

Department for Children, Schools and Families

Assessment of Capacity and Viability of Local Authority Outdoor Education Centres



Final Report

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Final Report

Submitted to:

Janet Dallas
Geography, ICT, Sustainability and
Technology Team
Department for Children, Schools
and Families
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

Submitted by:

CRG Research Limited
25 Cathedral Road
Cardiff
CF11 9TZ

Tel: 029 2034 3218
Fax: 029 2066 7328
Email: consult@crgresearch.co.uk
Website: www.crgresearch.co.uk

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The research team included:

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Executive Summary

Overview

- i. This report is about Local Authority Outdoor Education Centres used for Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC). It gives the results of a mapping exercise conducted across all Local Education Authorities in England, looks in more depth at the management, funding and other issues in 50 selected centres and also gives the reader an insight into what outdoor centres do through a series of seven case studies. It concludes that, while not an endangered species, many centres operate in conditions of uncertainty which is not helpful in supporting the LOtC Manifesto, launched last year by the Government.
- ii. Desk research conducted as part of the research reveals that young people, although they have much greater experience of the world through digital technology and travel, are much less likely to experience the outdoors either in terms of play or other experience than their parents' generation. One way of redressing this balance is for schools to offer more opportunities for learning, in its broadest sense, outside of the classroom. The government has endorsed this concept through its LOtC Manifesto to which those who sign up commit to, amongst other things, *“providing all young people with a wide range of experiences outside the classroom including extended school activities around one or more residential visits”*.
- iii. In the light of this Manifesto pledge, and the growing acknowledgement that LOtC provides considerable benefits to participants, this study has as its aim to undertake *“a mapping and feasibility study which charts the provision made by local authority centres, establishing the amount and nature of local authority provision in centres owned or managed by them (or in partnerships), their capacity in terms of client usage and their financial or asset viability”*.

Results

- iv. All 150 local authorities in England were contacted and a person was identified in 136 authorities who had responsibility for LOtC. A telephone survey of these individuals revealed that 76% (n=99) of local authorities have some form of provision and 24% (n=37) have no provision – although seven reported having had provision in the past. The survey revealed the presence of 235 centres in total with around a third of local authorities having one centre, around 15% with two and a fifth having three or more; one local authority had 12 centres.
- v. Over two thirds of local authorities operate a policy of subsidy in funding centres but some centres were self-funding and operated as charities or trusts – an increasingly

common arrangement. Despite the subsidy arrangement just 20% of local authorities felt that their funding was secure, many were unable to comment and a further 20% felt that their funding was 'vulnerable'.

- vi. Self-funders seemed to have greater certainty about funding than those operating on a subsidy model. Local authorities spent an average of £230,000 on their centres in total, or around £100,000 per centre. Many respondents (50%) were unclear about whether their budget had increased, 40% reported static or decreasing budgets and only 10% reported an increase – usually in line with inflation. For the future, of those who could answer the question, less than 5% were expecting an increase while a quarter anticipated a decrease.
- vii. Over two thirds of centres operate as residential centres and have between them approximately 1.2 million bed nights available per annum. This represents 17% of the capacity that would be required to give every child a residential experience during each of Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 or about half the capacity needed to provide just one experience during a child's whole compulsory schooling experience.
- viii. The report points to large differences between centres in staffing arrangements, occupancy and development opportunities. Take-up was most common amongst primary and secondary schools but there were a number of other groups using centres including special schools, youth and adult community groups and further education. Almost one third reported usage for corporate events.
- ix. 'Adventure' activities were the most commonly reported (82%) with personal development or field studies a close second and third. The vast majority of centres offered more than one type of activity with more than half offering four activities or more.
- x. The report 'maps' and analyses the location of centres. While one half are located in rural areas, over a quarter are in densely populated urban areas. Just under a quarter are located in National Parks and 11% are located in Wales.

Centre Managers Summary

- xi. Further interviews were carried out with 48 selected centre managers to provide a more in-depth view of issues facing centres. The general pattern of provision revealed by the local authority survey was broadly confirmed. Additionally, six key areas of operation are analysed in the report:
 - Running costs
 - Maintenance
 - Upgrading
 - Staff numbers and structure

- User groups
- Policy issues.

Running costs

- xii. There is significant variation in the scale of operations and budgets (£50,000 - £500,000). Significant cost increases were reported mainly around energy, expanded operation and staffing. Some centres reported a heavy reliance on expensive fuel options (oil, coal), while increases in staff costs was largely because centres had sought to expand operations to reach a break-even point. Some centres reported cuts in their local authority subsidy.

Maintenance

- xiii. Centres reported a number of issues many of which are related to the age and location of their buildings. Many subsidised centres reported lack of capital funds to undertake modernisation work which would make them more viable. Maintenance was prioritised as problems arose in many centres, although self-funding centres tended to take a more strategic approach with a view to keeping competitive.

Upgrading

- xiv. Some centres had plans to increase accommodation, improve facilities, move to sustainable running and extend their activity base. Many of those plans are about making centres more commercially viable but there is considerable uncertainty about where the finance is going to come from. Local authorities seem to be reluctant to invest even when a strong longer-term case can be made. Also some buildings were difficult to develop or had planning restrictions which limited expansion to a viable size.

Staff numbers and structures

- xv. Centre managers reported a number of different staffing structures but a common theme was that they had moved to more flexible staffing arrangements based on the use of more part-time and sessional specialist activity staff. This was mainly driven by the need to control costs.

User groups

- xvi. Centre managers reported that they try to make themselves available to as wide a range of user groups as possible but recognised that if they were a subsidised service their first priority had to be their own local authority. Widening the range of users is an alternative as it counteracts seasonal cycles of demand and allows for better income generation, especially from the corporate sector. The move to more autonomous school budgets has implications for subsidising less advantaged pupils which centres find very difficult to manage.

Policy issues

- xvii. Centre Managers were keen to air their views about wider issues affecting the LOtC agenda including:
- **Licensing** – generally welcomed as a means to raise standards but other measures (H&S, food standards) were felt to be unduly burdensome for the benefits they might offer
 - **Funding** – uncertainty was an issue but most centre managers felt that there was an untapped demand which they could access if they were allowed to invest
 - **Curriculum** – although often seen as a constraint could be seen as an opportunity for enrichment
 - **LOtC** – most believe that the educational argument has been won and see the manifesto as a helpful endorsement. There are concerns that without adequate funding it will be just rhetoric.

Case Studies

- xviii. Many of the issues outlined above arising from the Centre Managers' survey are amplified, and put in context, through a series of case studies. These are:
- **Llanrug** – one of the centres run by Worcester County Council which has gone through a turbulent time following a Best Value review in 2003
 - **Conway Centre** – a very large centre run on commercial lines by Cheshire County Council
 - **Plas Pencelli** – a 115 bed centre run by Swindon but with some input from Wiltshire representing a previous local government structure
 - **Caldecott Xperience** – a centre originally set up by Milton Keynes Development Corporation and now run as a partnership between the Youth Service and Milton Keynes Council
 - **Hampshire Mountain Centre** – one of three centres operated by Hampshire which subsidises it but also allows surpluses to be reinvested
 - **Ghyll Head** – operated by Manchester City Council - its only centre - where new funding arrangements are under discussion
 - **Lanehead** – a joint undertaking of the constituent parts of the former County of Cleveland and managed by Middlesbrough on behalf of the other councils. The four councils also share other facilities elsewhere.

- xix. Each case study covers:

- Centre background
- Management

- Finance and funding
- Staffing structures
- Utilisation and user groups
- Activities and education programme
- Maintenance.

xx. Additionally a number of key common themes are analysed which include:

- Long-term sustainability
- Attracting users
- Management issues

Long-term sustainability

xxi. Many of the case study centres live in financial uncertainty and fear the removal of subsidies will mean a move away from their traditional educational ethos to a more commercial one. Proper investment, however, would bring about sustainability in the longer term.

Attracting users

xxii. Although the manifesto raises the profile of centres it falls short of mandating schools to send pupils or giving pupils an 'entitlement'. There are strong disincentives for schools to engage with centres including cost, risk and a landscape dominated by the needs of the curriculum. Centres believe that there is a strong latent demand if these disincentives can be overcome.

Management issues

xxiii. These are mainly focused on costs – of which salary costs are the biggest issue - and marketing, which has become much more of a requirement as centres become more market orientated.

xxiv. The issues raised in the case studies largely reinforce the findings from the local authority and centre surveys.

Policy Considerations and Implementation

xxv. The report was not intended to include conclusions and recommendations but it does highlight a number of policy issues including:

- A number of gaps in knowledge in respect of private sector provision and what factors influence schools in their decisions to take up/not take up LOfC opportunities
- How the 'Manifesto' might be developed in the light of what we now know about the extent of provision

- How to build on the confidence licensing has started to provide and counteract risk aversion in schools.

xxvi. The study was conducted by **CRG Research Ltd** (Andrew Rix, Katy Skidmore, Nick Walne, Debbie Jones, Paula Shinton and Dyfrig Rees) and **Cardiff University School of Social Sciences** (Professor Sally Power and Dr Chris Taylor) with fieldwork taking place in early 2008. The research was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools and Families' (DCSF) Geography, ICT, Sustainability and Technology team. The views expressed in the report are those of the authors.

1 Introduction

Context

- 1.1 It could be argued that young people today have far greater awareness of the world around them than their parents and grandparents. For example, where overseas travel was once exceptional, for many young people it has now become the norm. New information technologies have also reduced geographical barriers and vastly increased the ways in which young people can explore and engage with distant communities.
- 1.2 However, while these changes have undoubtedly opened up new horizons, there are other ways in which it might be argued that young people's experiences are more limited than previously. Time spent with new technologies, for instance, has reduced the time they spend outside the home exploring their more local environment. This has been compounded by increased anxiety over child safety and protection which has made parents more risk-averse in what they let their children do. A recent survey, for example, found that while 71% of adults recalled playing outside in the street or area close to their homes every day when they were children, only 21% of children do so now (National Children's Bureau 2007²).
- 1.3 One way of redressing this imbalance is for schools to offer more out-of-classroom learning activities. A significant volume of research has concluded that these kinds of activities enhance student development in terms of both cognitive, affective and social outcomes (see Rickinson et al 2004³ and Scouts Association and Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 2005)⁴. Drawing on research from around the world, Malone concurred that children engaged in Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) achieve higher scores in class tests, have greater levels of physical fitness and motor skill development, increased confidence and self-esteem, show leadership qualities and are socially competent and more environmentally responsible⁵.

² National Children's Bureau (2007) 'Latest figures show dramatic reduction in children playing in their local streets', 31st July Press Release, www.ncb.org.uk .

³ Rickinson, M., Dillon, J., Teamey, K., Morris, M., Choi M. Y., Sanders, D., & Benefield, P. (2004, March). A review of research on outdoor learning. Shrewsbury, UK: National Foundation for Educational Research and King's College London.

⁴ Scouts Association and Duke of Edinburgh's Award (2005) Research into Residential Opportunities Available for Young People Through Schools, London Scouts Association and Duke of Edinburgh's Award

⁵ Malone, K (2008) Every Experience Matters: An evidence based research report on the role of learning outside the classroom for children's whole development from birth to eighteen years; Wollongong, UK University of Wollongong

1.4 The benefits of out-of-classroom learning have also now been politically endorsed. In November 2006, the Education and Skills Secretary, Alan Johnson, launched the LOtC Manifesto (DfES 2006⁶) with the promise that Government was committing itself to making learning outside the classroom an integral part of school life. Those who sign up to the Manifesto are committed to:

- i. Providing all young people with a wide range of experiences outside the classroom, including extended school activities and one or more residential visits.
- ii. Making a strong case for learning outside the classroom, so there is widespread appreciation of the unique contribution these experiences make to young people's lives.
- iii. Offering learning experiences of agreed high quality.
- iv. Improving training and professional development opportunities for schools and the wider workforce.
- v. Enabling schools, local authorities and other key organisations to manage visits safely and efficiently.
- vi. Providing easy access to information, knowledge, expertise, guidance and resources.
- vii. Identifying ways of engaging parents, carers and the wider community in learning outside the classroom

1.5 The DCSF invested £4.7 million in 2007/2008 to promote the aims of the Manifesto, which is currently underwritten by a coalition of over 1000 local authorities, schools and providers of LOtC.

1.6 The Manifesto is supported by a number of practical measures including:

- The development of communication tools to promote LOtC and highlight the contribution it can make to raising achievement
- Developing 'quality marks' to recognise high standards
- Support LOtC confidently and capably
- Working with the Training and Development Agency for Schools to improve the quality and availability of training
- Work together to encourage teachers and external providers to show clearly and simply how they meet health and safety standards, and to share expertise and best practice

⁶ DfES (2006) Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

- Ensure staff and others have easy access to the information, guidance and resources they need to prepare lessons and to organise and lead activities⁷.

1.7 However, despite the research evidence backing LOtC, there are anxieties that the opportunity to engage in these activities is declining. Various studies have pointed to a range of obstacles which threaten provision – school fears about pupil safety (Scouts Association and Duke of Edinburgh’s Award 2005, Jacobs 1996⁸, Thomas 1999⁹), professional inexperience and anxieties (Clay 1999¹⁰), diminishing local authority advisory services and facilities (Rickinson *et al* 2004), increasing legislative responsibilities (Thomas 1999), timetable pressures (Michie 1998¹¹) and parental and student reluctance (Bixler *et al* 1994¹²). While a recent survey of schools in England (O’Donnell *et al* 2006¹³) reports that teachers do not perceive a decline in LOtC activities, there is little doubt that the capacity to continue current levels of provision is under considerable pressure.

1.8 Research commissioned by the Real World Learning Campaign (a partnership between the Field Studies Council, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, National Trust, PGL, the Wildlife Trusts and the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust), shows that there is significant variation in the extent to which schools provide LOtC opportunities. There were, for example, marked differences between urban and rural schools, with rural schools offering on average far fewer activities than urban schools. There was also a relationship between levels of disadvantage and level of provision, while those with high levels of free school meal (FSM) eligibility were offered, on average, the fewest number of activities¹⁴.

1.9 These patterns may well be related to levels of local authority provision and guidance. Certainly at local level, some authorities, such as Bristol and Dorset, provide their own field studies centres while others do not.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Jacobs, Y. (1996) ‘Safety to adventure activities centres following the Lyme Bay tragedy: what are the legal consequences’, *Education and the Law* 8 (4) 295-306.

⁹ Thomas, S. (1999) ‘Safe practice in the “outdoor classroom”’, in C. Raymond (ed) *Safety Across the Curriculum*. London: Falmer Press.

¹⁰ Clay, G. (1999) ‘Outdoor and adventurous activities: an Ofsted survey’, *Horizons* 4 83-89

¹¹ Michie, M. (1998) ‘Factors influencing secondary science teachers to organise and conduct field trips’, *Australian Science Teachers’ Journal* 44 (4) 43-50.

¹² Bixler, R. D., Carlisle, C.L., Hammitt, W. E. & Floyd, A. F. (1994) ‘Observed fears and discomforts among urban students on field trips to wildland areas’, *Journal of Environmental Education*, 26 (1) 24-33.

¹³ O’Donnell, L., Morris, M. & Wilson, R. (2006) *Education Outside the Classroom: An Assessment of Activity and Practice in Schools and Local Authorities*. Windsor: NFER.

¹⁴ Power, S., Taylor, C., and Rees, G. (*forthcoming*) *Out-Of-School Learning: Variations in Provision and Participation in Secondary Schools*. Shrewsbury: Field Studies Council.

- 1.10 Additionally, while research shows that maintained schools in England are largely positive about the support received from their local authority, over one quarter claim that their authority does not have an Outdoor Education Advisor. There was a close relationship between the reported presence of an Outdoor Education Advisor and high levels of support.
- 1.11 These issues suggest that it is important to explore in greater depth the variable geography of provision for LOtC. Further it will be necessary to assess not just 'adequacy and sufficiency' of provision but also the arrangements in place to make available and manage the provision and to ensure its sustainability. Financial pressures, and the perceived pressures of the National Curriculum itself, may well be reducing the future opportunities for out of classroom activities. Taking stock to prevent further decline will be important.

Research Aims

- 1.12 In November 2007, CRG Research Ltd in partnership with Cardiff University School of Social Sciences was commissioned by the DCSF to undertake an 'Assessment of the Capacity and Viability of Local Authority Outdoor Education Centres'.
- 1.13 The aim of the research was to undertake:

“a mapping and feasibility study which charts the provision offered by local authority centres, establishing the amount and nature of local authority provision in centres owned or managed by them (or in partnerships), their capacity in terms of client usage and their financial and asset viability”

Method

1.14 The mapping and feasibility study was required to collect information from each English local authority and their outdoor centres on:

- Type of centre – day, residential or both; number of beds
- Ages and numbers of children/ young people catered for over the last two/ three years
- Other groups catered for
- Early Years Foundation Subjects (EYFS) / Curriculum subjects covered
- Personal/ other skills developed
- Types of activity provided
- Whether provision is increasing/decreasing or staying the same
- Level of local authority funding and what is planned over the next 5 – 20 years
- Other sources of funding accessed by centres no longer funded by local authorities
- Assess capital funding needs for:
 - Routine maintenance on an average annual basis
 - Upgrading to provide facilities suitable for current needs and expectations
 - Conversion to sustainable running (e.g. alternative sources of fuel for heating; water saving; insulation).

1.15 On the basis of this the following methodology was proposed:

Inception Stage

1.16 Held in late November 2007, this early stage meeting allowed further discussion regarding the issues surrounding local authority outdoor provision, clarification of the methodology and scope of interviews and identification of 'key informants' to approach for further information on the sector.

Development of Survey

Key Informant Interviews

1.17 Semi structured in-depth telephone and face to face interviews were conducted with a number of 'Key Informants' engaged in the outdoor sector in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues and challenges facing the sector and

any specific issues the survey should focus on. Representatives of the following organisations were interviewed:

- National Association of Field Studies Officers
- Adventures Activities Licensing Authority
- Hampshire and Worcestershire County Council Outdoor Education Advisors
- English Outdoor Council
- Field Studies Council
- Institute of Outdoor Learning
- Association for Science Education
- Association of Heads of Outdoor Centres
- Outdoor Educational Advisors Panel.

Development of Research Instruments

1.18 Using the requirements identified in paragraph 1.13 and points raised during Key Informant interviews, the Topic Guide in Appendix I was developed to be used in the survey with local authority outdoor advisors or other relevant personnel. However following 15 pilot interviews with local authority representatives in agreement with the DCSF the topic guide was amended for the following reasons:

- Due to the level of detail required - which often had to be duplicated for each local authority centre (n.b. most local authorities had between 1 and 7 centres) - most interviews far exceeded the 15 minute limit specified by the DCSF
- Local authority advisors had a good grasp of 'headline figures' but in many cases the more in depth information required could only be provided by Head of Centres, requiring additional follow up interviews (see Appendix I Sections B, C and D)
- Gathering detailed historical financial information was deemed to be inappropriate and often the interviewee (both local authority and Centre Manager) would not be able to provide this 'on the spot' therefore additional follow up interviews were required. It was agreed that a general indication of 'how' financial matters had changed (i.e. increased, decreased, stayed the same) over time was just as beneficial and less time consuming for both researcher and interviewee (see Appendix I Section B, Question 7)
- Neither local authority advisors nor Centre Managers consistently record visitor data broken down by age or Key Stage - to provide this information would increase the research burden on the respondent. They could provide a much more general indication of user group over time however (see Appendix I; Section C; Question 3)

- It was concluded that Finance Managers would not be able to provide the financial information provided and that it would be more appropriate to survey 50 Centre Managers to gain further insight into specific management issues (see paragraph 1.25)

1.19 The final version of the Local Authority Topic Guide can be found in Appendix II.

Local Authority Telephone Survey

1.20 Outdoor Advisors or individuals with a responsibility for outdoor education provision were identified in 136 out of 150 local authorities. For the purposes of this study, local authority centres that solely provided adventure activities were also included.

1.21 These individuals were contacted first by e-mail to explain the study and then by telephone to arrange a convenient time for interview. 98 telephone interviews were completed, some common problems were experienced in completing these interviews for the following reasons:

- Named individual no longer in post and failure to identify alternative contact
- Failure to make contact with the named individual despite various attempts, by both e-mail and telephone and leaving messages with colleagues
- Failure to keep appointments.

1.22 Where contact could not be made, information was supplemented from alternative sources such as the local authority's outdoor education web pages.

1.23 Despite considerable efforts, information on outdoor provision could not be collected for 12 local authorities.

Centre Telephone Survey

1.24 The tender specified that a telephone survey with 50 local authority finance and resource personnel would be undertaken in order to establish levels of funding for provision and assess capital funding needs. However as the Local Authority Telephone Survey progressed it became clear that such individuals would not have the level of information and knowledge to make this a useful exercise.

1.25 Given the problems outlined in paragraph 1.17 in obtaining detailed centre level data, with agreement with the DCSF it was decided that an in-depth telephone survey with 50 centre managers would allow us to explore in detail some of the issues and challenges faced by centres. Initial selections of centre managers for interview attempted to reflect the type and funding model of centres. However inevitably due to problems in engaging interviewees (see 1.21) 48 centre managers were attained. The topic guide for this survey can be found in Appendix III.

Case Studies

- 1.26 Case studies on 7 centres were undertaken in order to gain an in depth understanding of the operation of a centre and any specific issues and challenges it faces. Semi structured interviews were conducted with the Head of Centre, staff and visiting groups where possible (See Appendix V for Topic Guide).
- 1.27 The centres were identified through a combination of the Key Informant interviews and at the Local Authority Telephone Survey stage and were selected to reflect the different funding models and management approaches:
- Worcestershire County Council – Llanrug: subsidised centre; recently under threat of closure
 - Cheshire County Council – Conway Centre: large self-funded centre
 - Swindon Borough Council – Plas Pencelli: small subsidised centre; mainly off-site activities
 - Milton Keynes Council - Caldecotte Xperience: subsidised centre; growing user base
 - Hampshire County Council – Hampshire Mountain Centre: subsidised centre; strong local authority outdoor provision
 - Manchester City Council – Ghyll Head: subsidised centre; currently under review with proposals of conversion to charitable trust status
 - Middlesbrough, Stockton on Tees, Redcar and Cleveland, Hartlepool Borough Councils – Lanehead: subsidised centre; shared provision.

Structure of Report

- 1.28 The report is structured as follows:
- Section 2: Mapping Study
 - Section 3: Centre Analysis
 - Section 4: Centre Case Studies
 - Section 5: Key Themes
 - Section 6: Policy Considerations and Implications.

2 Mapping Study

Methods

- 2.1 Information on outdoor education provision was collected from 136 local authorities. 98 telephone interviews were conducted between January and March 2008. Where telephone interviews could not be obtained information on outdoor provision was supplemented from web-based sources – usually a combination of the local authority website and centre website.
- 2.2 No information on outdoor education provision in 14 local authorities was found – we could assume, given the tendency to post information about outdoor provision on local authority websites, that these authorities do not fund any provision.
- 2.3 This section presents an analysis and discussion of the data collected from the mapping study and is broken down into the following sections:
- Local authority provision
 - Local authority funding
 - Types of outdoor centre
 - Staffing
 - Centre costs
 - Centre charges
 - Centre activities
 - Geography of outdoor education centres.

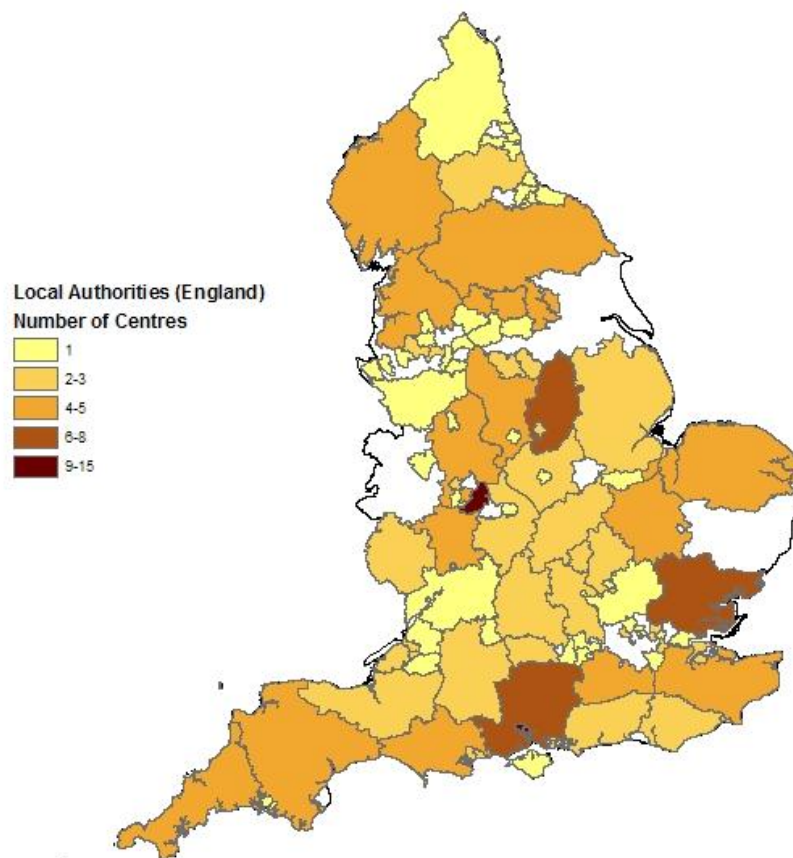
Local Authority Provision

- 2.4 66% of local authorities (n=99) had some form of outdoor provision. 24% (n=37) authorities stated that they had no provision, 7 of which claimed they did have provision in the past.
- 2.5 The number of outdoor centres that each local authority was responsible for varied (Table 1 and Figure 1). Nearly half just had one centre, but two local authorities had over ten centres. In total there were reported to be 235 local authority centres (located across England and Wales). More detailed information was available for 210 of these centres.

Table 1 Number of Outdoor Education Centres

Number of Centres	Number of Local Authorities	Percentage of Local Authorities	Cumulative Percentage of LA Providers
<i>No data</i>	15	10%	-
0	36	24%	-
1	47	31%	48%
2	22	15%	70%
3	8	5%	78%
4	14	9%	92%
5	3	2%	95%
7	2	1%	97%
8	1	0.7%	98%
12	1	0.7%	99%
15	1	0.7%	100%

Figure 1 Number of Outdoor Education Centres, by Local Authority



Local Authority Funding

2.6 Of the local authorities that were sufficiently knowledgeable about their funding arrangements (68%), the majority reported that they operated a subsidised arrangement for their centre(s). (see Table 2) The remaining answers confirmed a self-funding model with control being exercised either by the authorities concerned or some other arrangement (trust/charity etc.). Several of these arrangements were relatively new and show a shift away from the supported model to one where centres need to pay their way via income generation from schools or others.

Figure 2 Models of Funding/ Provision

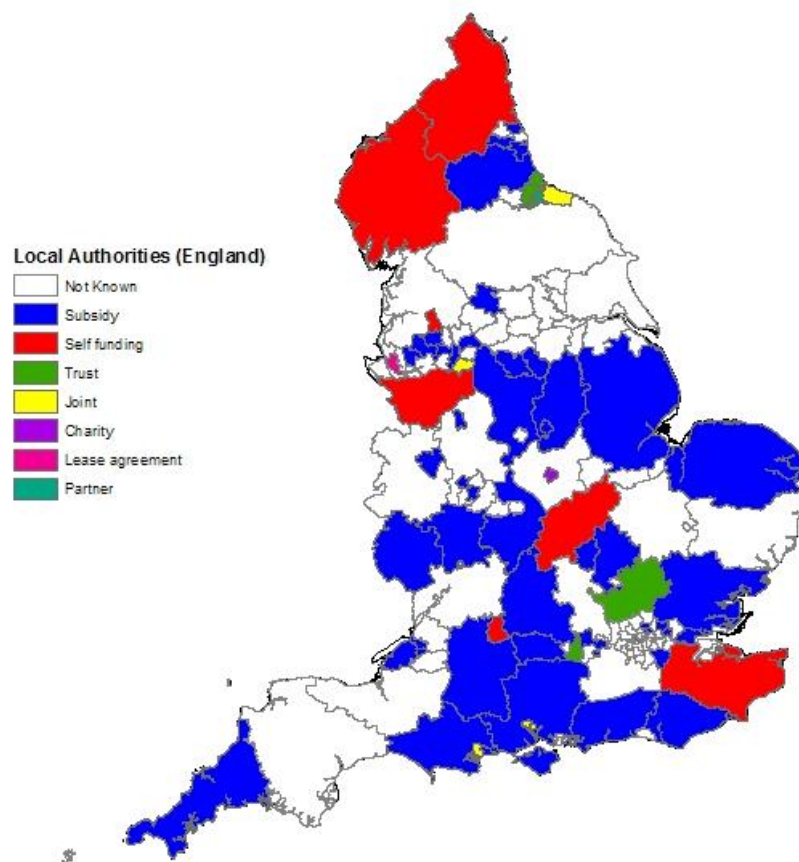


Table 2 Models of Provision

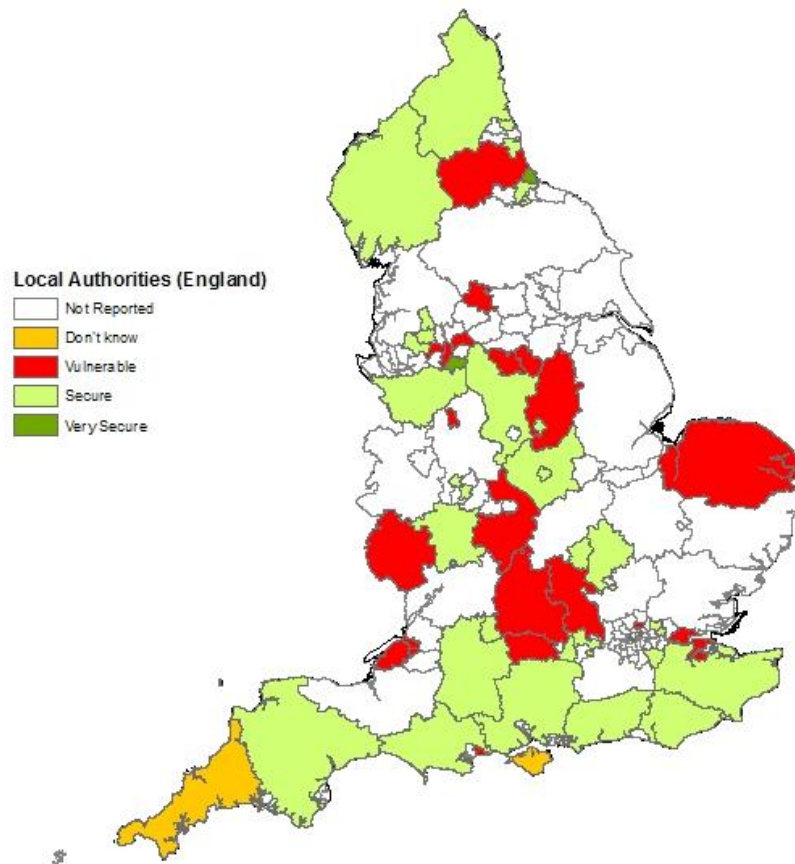
Model of Provision	Number of Local Authorities	Percentage of LA Providers
<i>Not known</i>	32	32%
Subsidy	49	50%
Self funding	7	7%
Joint	4	4%
Trust	4	4%
Charity	1	1%
Lease agreement	1	1%
Partner	1	1%

2.6 Despite the high number of local authorities which financially support their centres directly few of them said that the future of their centres was very secure (just 2% of all local authorities) (Table 3 and Figure 3). Nearly half of local authorities felt unable to give a view about their financial future. Around 20% of all local authorities said their centres' future was vulnerable.

Table 3 Future of Centres

Future of Centres	Number of Local Authorities	Percentage of LA Providers
<i>Not known</i>	42	42%
Don't know	2	2%
Vulnerable	20	20%
Secure	33	33%
Very secure	2	2%

Figure 3 Future of Centres



2.7 Local authorities that operate a subsidy model of provision were more likely to report uncertainty in the future of the centres (with 'don't know' and 'vulnerable' responses) (Table 4). Self-funding models of provision would seem to generate greater certainty in the future of the centres, at least from the perspective of the local authority representatives. However, it should be noted that more local authorities working with a subsidy model of provision felt that their centres were secure than those working with the self-funding model – suggesting that the subsidy model does not necessarily lead to an uncertain and vulnerable future of the centres. Models of joint provision and trust/charity status seemed to offer greater security for the centres, although this is based on a very small number of centres.

Table 4 Future of Centres by Model of Provision/ Funding

Model	Percentage of LAs by Model				
	Don't know	Vulnerable	Secure	Very secure	TOTAL
Subsidy	5%	43%	52%	0%	100%
Self funding	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%
Joint	0%	0%	0%	100%	100%
Trust	0%	0%	67%	33%	100%
Charity	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%

- 2.8 Nearly all the local authorities that said the future of their centres were vulnerable based this on the apparent reduction in budget from the local authority. For some of these they were concerned that moves towards self-funding models of provision would lead to uncertainty and insecurity. None reported any demand-side reasons for their future (in) security.
- 2.9 Many of the local authorities that said the future of their centres was secure based this on the successful operation of being self-funded. A smaller number of local authorities felt the future of their centres was secure because of recent capital investments made by the local authority in the centres. But the main reason given for centres with a very secure future was that the funding and responsibility for the centre was shared (for example, with other local authorities or with other agencies such as the Scouts).
- 2.10 Where local authorities did provide financial assistance their average contribution was £229,900 (this is based on figures from 43 local authorities). The calculated average financial contribution per centre was £96,153. The t majority of local authorities seemed to spend up to £99,999 per centre (Figure 4). However, there were a number of local authorities that appeared to spend substantially more per centre (over £200,000).
- 2.11 Financial figures were also collected for each centre (Figure 5). Of the 74 centres where this information was available 84% said that they received funding from the local authority. On average they reported receiving £111,509 – only slightly more than the calculated average based on aggregated local authority figures above. A total of £6.6 million was given by local authorities to the 62 centres that said they received such funding¹⁴.

¹⁴ See also, Appendix IV; Figure II: Local Authority Funds by Centre

Figure 4 Local Authority Funding per Centre (calculated from local authority aggregated figures)

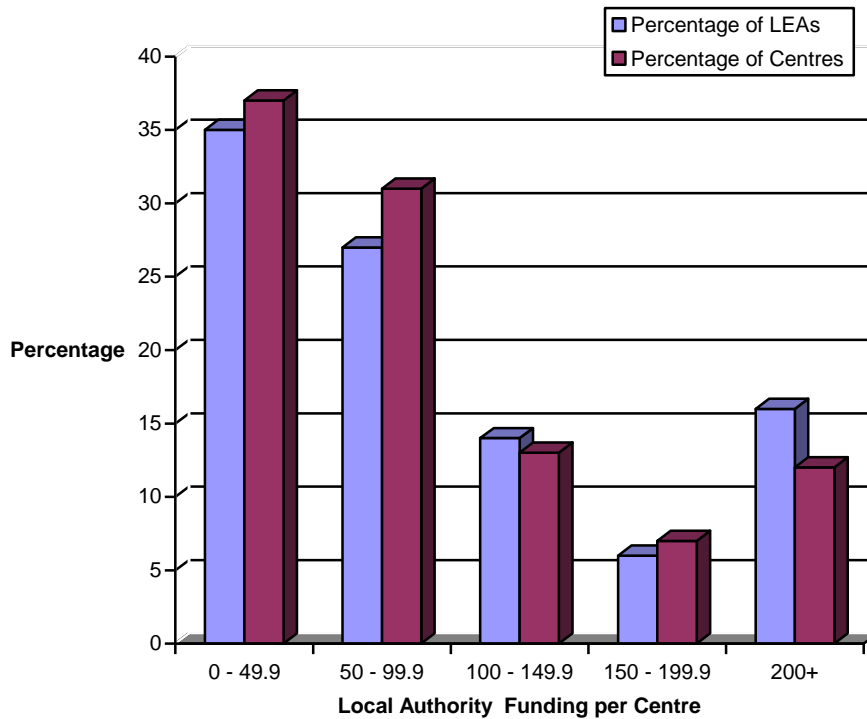
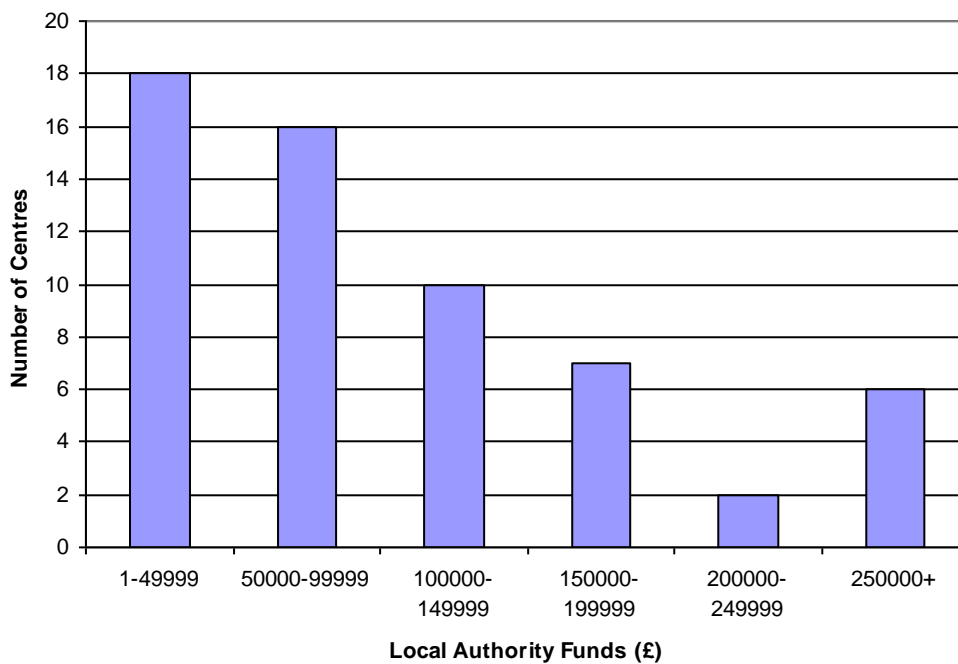


Figure 5 Local Authority Funding per Centre (based on figures provided for each centre)



- 2.12 Just as there was uncertainty amongst many local authorities about the future of their centres, similar numbers of local authorities did not know about recent changes in their funding of centres (Table 5). Where local authorities were confident in reporting this there was an important divide between the number that thought funding had decreased and the number that thought funding had stayed the same. Only a minority reported increases in funding in recent years.
- 2.13 Where local authority funding has stayed the same over recent years this was largely because the centres were either self-funding or had received inflationary increases in funding because of budget constraints. For the small number of local authorities where funding had increased over recent years, this was sometimes only in line with inflation. Three local authorities said that the increases in their funding reflected increases in the running costs of the centres; only one said that this was because the number of users had increased.

Table 5 Recent Changes to Local Authority Funding

Recent changes to LA funding	No. of LAs	Percentage of LA providers
<i>Not known</i>	47	48%
Don't know	2	2%
Decreased	20	20%
Stayed the same	20	20%
Increased	10	10%

- 2.14 Around half of the local authorities that had witnessed a decline in funding said that this was because of budgetary cuts or constraints. The remaining half tended to say that the decline had been part of a longer-term process of making the centres become self-financing.
- 2.15 These trajectories of funding looked likely to continue into the future (Table 6). However, there would appear to be a gradual shift towards further decreases in funding, at the expense of either continuing with current levels of funding or increases in funding.

Table 6 Future Changes to Local Authority Funding

Future changes in LA funding	No. of LAs	Percentage of LA providers
<i>Not known</i>	47	48%
Don't know	9	9%
Decrease	25	25%
Stay the same	14	14%
Increase	4	4%

2.16 Similar reasons were given for the expected decline or increase in future funding by the local authority as were given for changes in recent funding. However, the majority of local authorities reporting a decline in future funding said that this would be due to budgetary pressures within the authority. The four local authorities that said they expected an increase in funding in the future gave very disparate reasons. One said that any increase would reflect changes in inflation. Another said that the increase would reflect an increase in running costs. Only one said that the increase in funding would be intended to minimise the costs passed on to schools. Interestingly the remaining local authority said that the expected increase would reflect a strong link to curriculum developments and to ensure their centre is embedded in the community.

Types of Centres

2.17 Over two-thirds of centres have residential facilities; less than half of these are also available for just day-use (Table 7).

Table 7 Types of Centres

Type of Centre	Number of Centres	Percentage of all Centres
<i>Not known</i>	9	4%
Day	65	31%
Residential	80	38%
Both	56	27%

2.18 In total there is overnight accommodation of 7,475 beds across all these centres (2,953 in day *and* residential centres). On average there are 62 beds in each centre, but the greatest proportion of centres have between 20 and 40 residential beds (Figure 6). There are then an additional number (approximately 15%) of large centres with more than 100 residential beds.

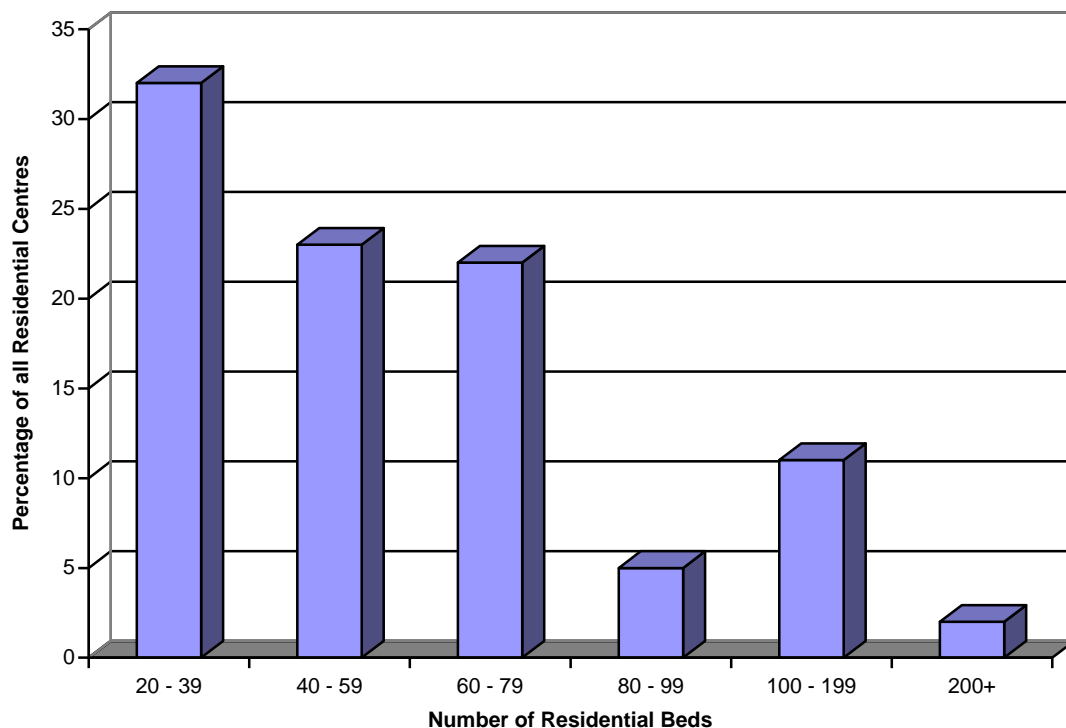
2.19 Table 8 below shows the number of pupils in England in the final year of each of the Key Stage levels 2, 3 and 4.

Table 8 Pupils in England by Key Stage

Key Stage	No. Pupils	Required Capacity (bed nights)
2 – Year 6	582,853	2,331,412
3 – Year 9	586,327	2,345,308
4 - Year 11	596,817	2,387,268
Total	1,765,997	7,063,988

- 2.20 Column 2 (No. pupils) shows the capacity that would be required to guarantee each pupil at each of Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 a one week (4 nights) residential experience assuming a maximum occupancy capacity of the residential places mapped by this study to be 4 nights x 40 weeks x 7,495 beds equals 1199200? bed nights per annum. The current capacity required to give each pupil a four night residential at each of the Key Stages is shown in the right hand column. Current capacity represents around 17% of what would be needed to meet this level of demand or about half of the potential demand for each Key Stage group.
- 2.21 This, however, is an over – simplistic view of capacity as some centres operate 7 nights a week (but may use the weekend capacity for adult or corporate bookings), and others cannot currently offer 4 nights or are under pressure to offer shorter residential experiences.
- 2.22 Eight centres reported having additional camping spaces; between them these provide a further 1,291 residential spaces¹⁵. However ‘camping’ beds are clearly not available all year – most likely between June and September, which is period dominated by examinations and at least six weeks of school holidays.

Figure 6 Number of Residential Beds per Centre



¹⁵ See also Appendix IV; Figure III: Residential Beds by Centre

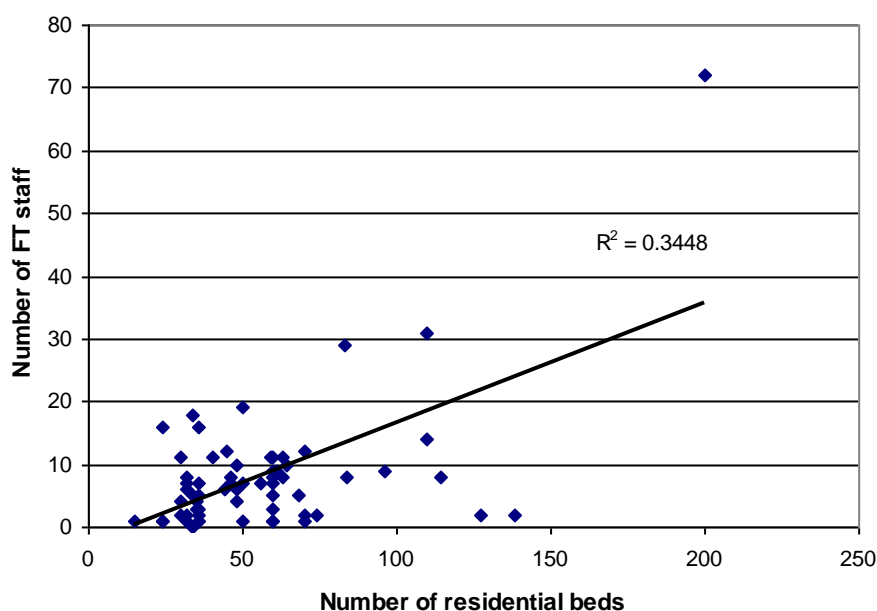
Staffing

2.23 There is estimated to be just fewer than 650 full-time staff employed across all the centres, with an additional 373 part-time staff. Many of the centres also employ a large number of sessional/seasonal/casual staff. On average residential centres tend to employ more staff than day centres (Table 9), but the correlation between the number of residential beds and the number of FT staff employed at each centre is not that strong ($R^2 = 0.34$) (Figure 7)¹⁶. This suggests that larger centres either achieve some economies of scale –proportionally more beds per staff member or that they manage peaks by employing temporary staff or both.

Table 9 Staffing of Centres

Type of Centre	Total number of FT staff	Total number of PT staff	Average number of FT staff
Both	225	168	9.4
Day	125	64	4.8
Residential	296	141	7.2
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>646</i>	<i>373</i>	

Figure 7 Relationships between Staff and Centres



¹⁶ See also Appendix IV; Figure IV Number of Full Time Staff by Centre

Centre Costs

- 2.24 There is a major shortage of information available regarding the running and capital costs of centres. Of the thirteen centres where this information was obtainable the average running cost was £216,438. Although analysis of the running costs is limited by the limited amount of information retrieved it would seem that running costs have little relationship to the size of the centres (as measured by full time staff or the number of residential beds they have). In other words the number of FT staff or the number of residential beds a centre has does not appear to have any bearing on the running costs of a centre. These costs would therefore seem to be dependent on other aspects of the centre, such as the activities they provide.
- 2.25 Nearly all of these centres reported that their running costs had increased in recent years. It was reported for three centres that their running costs had increased due to increases in use. For three other centres running costs had increased due to significant increases in energy costs
- 2.26 In terms of capital costs, these were expected to increase for five centres and stay the same for seven centres. The rest did not know what their future capital costs would be. It was also reported that for nine centres their facilities were being upgraded, eight further centres were not having their facilities upgraded and two said that any upgrades were dependent on funding.
- 2.27 Local authorities and centres were also asked whether the centres were already or currently converting to sustainable running. Again, information was scarce, but the majority that did provide a response said that this was not underway (Table 10).

Table 10 Conversion to Sustainable Running

Conversion to sustainable running	Number of Centres
Yes	5
No	11
Possible	1

Centre Charges

- 2.28 The overwhelming majority of centres charge schools from their corresponding local authority to use their facilities (97% of valid responses). Just over half (55%) of centres receive a subsidy from their local authority when their schools use the centre. This may or may not be additional to the funds that local authorities say they provide (see above).

- 2.29 It is unsurprising that given nearly all local authority schools are charged when using the centres that nearly all non-local authority schools (i.e. those schools that are not from the corresponding local authority that is responsible for the centre) are also charged. Only three centres do not charge non-local authority schools. Six centres said that they receive subsidies for non-local authority school use.
- 2.30 Centres were also asked what proportion of their running costs are charged back to schools that use their facilities (Table 11). There were quite differing practices regarding the levels of charges on schools. Some centres charge schools the full running costs while many others charge less than half of the running costs.

Table 11 Charges Against Running Costs

Percentage of running costs	Number of Centres
0 – 25%	2
26 – 50%	6
51 – 75%	2
76 – 100%	6

Centre Users

- 2.31 Table 12 highlights the main user groups of the centres. Nearly all centres are used by primary schools or primary age groups (97%), followed by secondary groups. Just fewer than three-quarters of the centres are used by Special Schools. But over half are used by post-compulsory school age groups (further education, youth and adult).
- 2.32 Approximately fourteen centres said that their main user groups were just Primary and/or Secondary schools or age groups. Eight centres also said that they were also used by independent schools.

Table 12 Main User Groups

User Group	Percentage of Centres ¹⁷
Primary	97%
Secondary	87%
Special schools	71%
Further education	61%
Youth	58%
Adult	58%
Corporate	31%
Other	15%

2.33 Nearly a third of centres reported usage by corporate groups. Although this represents additional income when it is confined to weekends it may be at the expense of availability to schools on weekdays.

Centre Activities

2.34 The vast majority of centres are available for Adventure activities (82%) (Table 13). Only two-thirds of the centres are used for Curriculum activities (67%). Table 14 illustrates that the range of activities that centres provide for varies quite significantly, with just over half of all centres offering three or more kinds of activities.

Table 13 Centre Activities

Activity	Percentage of Centres ¹⁸
Adventure	82%
Personal Development	76%
Field	74%
Curriculum	67%
Farm and Countryside	32%
Built Heritage	22%

Table 14 Range of Activities

¹⁷ based on data for 150 Centres

¹⁸ based on data for 185 Centres

Number of Activities	Percentage of Centres	Cumulative Percentage
1	6%	6%
2	20%	26%
3	22%	48%
4	30%	78%
5	12%	90%
6	10%	100%

Geography of Outdoor Education Centres

2.35 The location of local authority centres is presented in Figure 8. This illustrates that 23 of the centres (11%) are located in Wales. Just under one quarter of all Centres (22%) are located within National Park boundaries¹⁹. Table 15 also shows that a quarter of centres (26%) are located in high density urban areas, and just over half are located in mainly rural areas²⁰.

Figure 8 Location of Local Authority Outdoor Centres

¹⁹ See also Appendix IV, Figure V

²⁰ See all Appendix IV, Figure VI: Density by Centre; Figure VII: Centres Located Outside or Inside their Local Authority; Figure VII: Field Studies Council Centres

◆ Local Authority Outdoor Education Centres

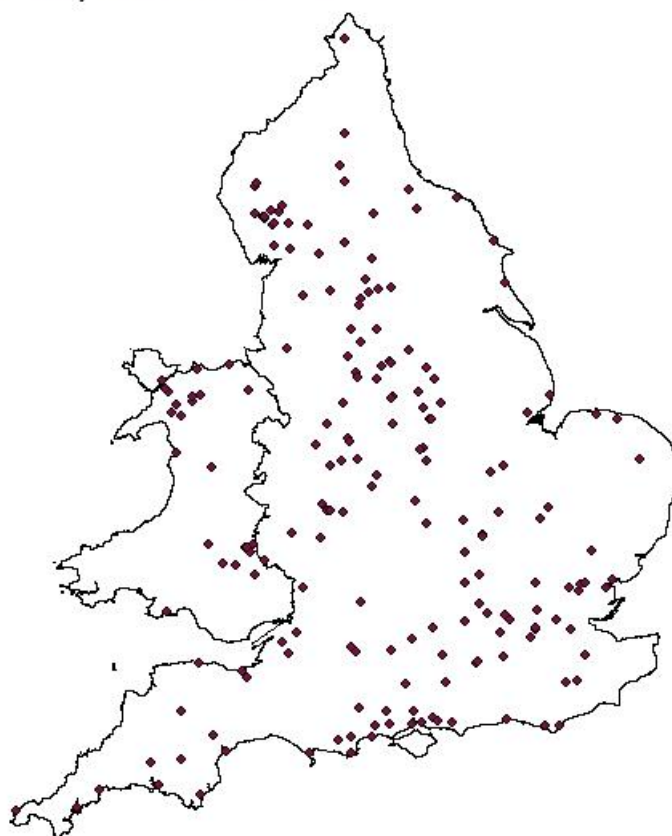


Table 15 Urban - Rural Location of Centres

Urban-Rural Location	Percentage of Centres	Cumulative Percentage
Urban - less sparse	28%	26%
Town and Fringe - less sparse	5%	38%
Town and Fringe - sparse	1%	43%
Village - less sparse	21%	44%
Village - sparse	7%	72%
Hamlet and Isolated Dwelling - less sparse	26%	93%
Hamlet and Isolated Dwelling - sparse	11%	100%

3 Centre Survey Analysis

Introduction

3.1 A telephone survey was undertaken with 48 centre managers in order to gain a greater understanding of the issues and challenges they face in both the day to day operation of their centres as well as their future development. Given the relatively small number of interviews, a quantitative analysis would not be appropriate, however a number of common themes were identified and have been broken down into the following categories:

- Running costs
- Maintenance
- Upgrading
- Staff numbers and structures
- User groups
- Policy issues.

Running Costs

3.2 Amongst the centres interviewed, significant variation was observed in the annual running costs faced, ranging from £50,000 to £505,000 per annum. In terms of the change in costs over the last five years, whilst some interviewees were unsure whether they had changed, the vast majority suggested they had increased, primarily due to increased energy costs, expanded operations and staffing costs.

Increases in energy and other utility costs

3.3 In keeping with cost increases seen in the wider economy, outdoor education centres have seen significant increases in heating, lighting, transportation costs, etc. In some cases, where centres previously offered transportation to in-authority users, price increases have led to the removal of this offer. It was also noted that some centres run on comparatively expensive fuel sources (e.g. oil, coal, etc) and are therefore seeking to change to cheaper sources of energy to overcome this – one centre had recently switched from gas to wood pellets.

Expanded operations and staffing costs

- 3.4 In an effort to increase throughput, and therefore revenue, some centres had expanded their operations, particularly those anticipating a move to self-funding status. However, along with increased revenue higher input costs have been realised, primarily due to greater use of seasonal staff (given the need to maintain compliance with minimum staffing ratios as well as ensuring the centre is able to deliver a quality experience for all). Where permanent staff have been taken on, higher costs came through a perceived need to offer higher salaries to attract the best staff and general increases in teachers pay, amongst others.
- 3.5 In two instances it was commented that running costs had decreased, something which came about as a result of a reduction in the subsidies available to the centres causing a 'restructuring' of operations.
- 3.6 Future expectations suggested a majority of centres anticipate running costs to continue to increase in a similar vein, primarily due to increases in fuel and staffing costs.

Maintenance

- 3.7 Approximately a third of the centres commenting on maintenance within their centres believed there would be an increase in 'capital funding needs for routine maintenance' in future, the vast majority of whom attributed this to the age of their buildings.
- 3.8 One centre suggested that one big spend would reduce the maintenance costs they incur on an annual basis. However, as with many centres, budgetary constraints within both local authorities and individual centres make such a one-off investment difficult to finance without benefactors.
- 3.9 It is apparent that whilst maintenance and upgrading may be prioritised according to the urgency of works required within a subsidised model, a move to self-funding in a competitive market increases the importance of all aspects of delivery being of the highest standard; as a result, apparently less important cosmetic needs take on increased significance in the competitive market.

Upgrading

- 3.10 Plans to upgrade facilities at centres essentially fall into four main categories, these being accommodation, facilities, sustainable running and other areas of delivery. As with maintenance, however, for many financing these upgrades are unlikely to be achievable through generated income alone.

Accommodation

- 3.11 A small number of centres commented on plans to increase accommodation to generate increased throughput and therefore revenue. Whilst these plans were said to be targeted over the next 5 years, they appear contingent upon the availability of funds.

Facilities

- 3.12 Commensurate with an increase in accommodation facilities, some centres suggested there was a need to increase w.c., changing and showering facilities: for some centres little had been done to these facilities since the centre began operating. Similarly, an increase in throughput would also necessitate increased investment in things such as mountain bikes, waterproof clothing, etc which would in turn require investment in additional storage capacity.

Sustainable Running

- 3.13 The extent to which centres have embraced sustainable running varied greatly across the centres sampled, from those having achieved eco-centre status to others with no current plans to introduce these initiatives.
- 3.14 In addition to the clear environmental benefits, those centres suggesting a possible move to sustainable running saw potential long-term financial benefits from, for example, introducing solar panels and wind turbines. On a smaller scale, changes which had been introduced with a view to minimising energy wasted included the introduction of movement sensorised lighting systems, new boilers, etc: these systems also assist centres in managing costs.

Other Areas of Delivery

- 3.15 One aspect of upgrading raised during a small number of interviews concerned the need to invest in access for disabled users and compliance with relevant legislation. The buildings occupied by many centres do not naturally accommodate disabled requirements, and in some cases this has been overcome with purpose built accommodation. However, some may be restricted in their ability to expand in this manner by capacity and budgetary constraints, compounding a limited ability to modify old buildings.

Summary

- 3.16 In relation to all aspects of maintenance and upgrading of facilities, funding is clearly a major factor, particularly in view of the uncertainty regarding the future of a number of centres. Ironically, a move to self-funding status for any centre will require their facilities to be competitive with other local authority and private providers, and as such failure to invest now may have repercussions for their future viability.

Staff Numbers and Structures

- 3.17 Staffing structures within centres followed no strict pattern in terms of numbers, roles and whether part-time, full-time or casual, being largely driven by specific events in the development of each centre.
- 3.18 In response to financial pressures, centres had adopted different strategies to curtail costs in this area, with the broad responses being: increased use of seasonal staff; increased use of part-time working arrangements; and lower overall staffing.

Increasing use of seasonal/sessional staff

- 3.19 The majority of centres interviewed acknowledged using seasonal/sessional staff at various times throughout the year. In a number of cases these working arrangements had been introduced at the expense of full-time employees, allowing staffing levels to be demand led and flexible, thereby ensuring unnecessary costs are not carried during quiet periods. Whilst not all centres make use of seasonal/sessional staff, in many cases a number of 'preferred suppliers' are held and regularly accessed during peak periods (one centre maintains a list of 60 sessional workers), thereby allowing standards of delivery to be maintained.
- 3.20 Where centres reported using casual (sessional) or freelance staff they were more likely to be employed in centres that offer adventure activities and, most importantly, centres that offer curriculum activities (see Table 16).

Table 16 Use or Casual of Freelance Staff

Activity	Percentage	
	Of all Centres	Of Centres reporting the use of casual or freelance staff
Adventure	82%	94%
Personal Development	76%	62%
Field	74%	74%
Curriculum	67%	83%
Farm and Countryside	32%	12%
Built Heritage	22%	6%

Increased use of part-time contracts

3.21 In a small number of centres part-time contracts had been introduced to allow them to retain staff numbers whilst lowering their cost base (through a lower full time equivalent) and adding to flexibility in delivery.

Lower overall staffing levels

3.22 Where lower overall staffing levels had been introduced (including management, delivery staff, housekeeping, etc.) this was, in a number of cases, accompanied by increasingly flexible working practices, with staff generally ‘mucking in’ to whatever needs doing on site. Furthermore, placing greater emphasis on visiting groups to maintain facilities during their stay, such as making beds and cleaning dormitories, was suggested to contribute to the personal and social development aspects of visiting a centre.

User Groups

3.23 Overall, irrespective of the funding model applied, those interviewed suggested their facilities were available to a wide range of user-groups. In a number of instances however, those operating under subsidies from the local authority did prioritise availability to local schools – some as a result of service level agreements (SLAs) with the local authority and others in recognition of the fact that they are essentially a local authority service.

3.24 A number of centres commented that in recent years they had widened access as a result of a number of inter-linked factors including efforts to increase business, avoiding over-reliance on one user group, and factors impacting on demand from schools in the local authority.

Increase in business

- 3.25 Identifying additional users over and above local authority schools allows centres to avoid cyclical demand patterns following school terms.

Diversification of user-groups

- 3.26 Whether self-funding and needing to maximise income to break even or subsidised and facing decreasing budgets from the local authority, centres have had to diversify their user groups in order to prevent being over-reliant on any one user-group. In the event of a downturn in demand from one group, diversification cushions the centres from any significant adverse impact on their income.

Demand changes from LA schools

- 3.27 Changes to the school curriculum, with an increased onus on academic attainment, have impacted on demand from schools: both primary (SATs) and secondary (GCSEs/A-levels) level schools have experienced these effects. With a limited number of schools in each local authority area centres have had to widen their net in order to maximise utilisation rates.

Charging Users

- 3.28 Throughout all of the centres interviewed charges were applied to in-authority school users, possibly reflecting the fact that as budgets have been increasingly devolved to schools there is a clear rationale for charging – schools pay for what they use. In the vast majority of cases centres offered no financial subsidy to local authority schools over other users, although in a small number of other cases where it was claimed a subsidy was available this was a nominal amount (a ‘gesture of goodwill’ to local authority schools). Notwithstanding this it was acknowledged during a number of interviews that the local authority will offer funding for disadvantaged families (e.g. free school meals) in order to offer equality of access.
- 3.29 In relation to non local authority schools, only 2 centres stated that there is a subsidy available to these users: in one instance this is available to a neighbouring area (for schools signing up to an SLA) which previously shared ownership of the venue and in the other area a small ‘geographically unconstrained’ fund is available through fundraising, which is made available to disadvantaged children.

Policy Issues

- 3.30 Centres were asked to comment about policy trends which were likely to have an impact on what and how centres delivered their outdoor education. 29 out of the 48 made some comment.
- 3.31 Comments fell into four main headings: licensing and health and safety, funding, the curriculum and broader issues about policy and lifestyle.

Licensing

- 3.32 Increased legislation was seen to be having a negative impact on centres, raising costs and creating a more risk-averse culture in schools because the legislation raised unwarranted fears. Although licensing was generally viewed positively (it has raised standards), other aspects of legislation (Criminal Records Bureau checks, minibus driver licensing, food standards regulation, fire regulation) tended to be seen as creating paperwork which was out of all proportion to benefits it delivered. Health and safety regulation and the resulting paperwork emphasised the negative output to the schools without pointing out the significant benefits accruing to young people.

Funding

- 3.33 While some felt that budgets were under threat and local authority funding was likely to diminish, there was also a feeling that centres could become more income generating if they sold themselves better to schools, which increasingly hold the budget.

The curriculum

- 3.34 Opinion was approximately equally divided between those who saw the curriculum as a threat, too narrow to include many outdoors activities, and those who saw, more recent, broadening which provided opportunities for outdoor education to add to or enrich aspects of the curriculum more generally.

Broader issues

- 3.35 The LOtC agenda, particularly the manifesto was welcomed as a signal of support and also as an initiative which resonated with a shift in public opinion towards healthier and more sustainable lifestyles. There was concern that having raised the profile of LOtC the government was unable/unwilling to fund it properly.

3.36 Centres were also asked about their *“future vision of LOtC”*. A similar number (27) responded and to some extent comments were similar to their policy oriented responses. While a few had concerns over funding uncertainty others were very much more positive. Although some felt that there were still tensions surrounding the curriculum, a majority thought the argument of outdoor activities had been won. The difficulty was getting schools to come in the first place (especially senior schools) but once they had been won over they tended to keep coming back. Several respondents felt that there was a ‘new curriculum’ around energy and sustainability that was creating new interest and opportunities within the school sector.

4 Case Studies

Introduction

4.1 In depth case studies were conducted with 7 local authority centres. Centres were selected following the Local Authority Telephone Survey to reflect a range of funding and management models and sizes. Visits to the centre's were undertaken and incorporated semi structured interviews with the Head of Centres, centre staff and where possible representatives of visiting groups. Interviews aimed to explore the following issues in detail:

- Centre background
- Management
- Finance and funding
- Facilities
- Staffing structures
- Utilisation and user groups
- Activities and education programmes
- Maintenance.

Llanrug (Worcestershire County Council)

Background

4.2 Llanrug is currently one of three Outdoor Education Centres owned by Worcestershire County Council, although it is the only centre located out-of-county, being based in North Wales. Established in 1970, the centre initially operated as part of Hereford - Worcester County Council, although following local government re-organisation the centre resided solely with Worcester in terms of responsibility and ownership.

4.3 In recent years the centre has been through a turbulent and uncertain period, following a Best Value Review in 2003, which resulted in a business plan being developed by the local authority incorporating stepped reductions in the budget available to the centre. However, for a number of reasons the actual budgets made available to the centre remained unchanged over subsequent years, despite the changes laid down in the business plan. Given that the centre operated within the budgets made available, the local authority asserted that no effort had been made to adhere to the business plan, and as such a further review was conducted in 2006

by the cabinet. Set in the context of the council having to make significant savings, the outcome of this latest review was that unless the centre could move to zero budgets (i.e. become self-sustaining) by March 2008, closure was the best option, although moving to zero budgets was not (and is not) considered feasible by the centre. However, massive opposition from schools, parents and political parties and a review of the procedure followed in arriving at the decision by the Overview and Scrutiny committee in 2007 resulted in a reversal of the closure decision.

- 4.4 As a result of this process, many believe Llanrug now has a secure future ahead, although this is not necessarily the case, as the local authority have given the centre three years to move to zero budgets from the start of 2008: the same issues and anxieties are faced by the centre.

Management

- 4.5 The local authority has historically taken a very hands-off approach to the management of the centre, devolving responsibility for all aspects of its operation to the Head of Centre. However, in view of the move to zero budgets and the greater constraints faced by the council financially, this is anticipated to change for the period 2008-2011.

Financial

- 4.6 The centre is currently heavily subsidised and does not access any other sources of funding, although they do recognise that in future they will have to look to other sources as required. Aside from the time taken to undertake this activity (with staffing levels which have decreased over time when faced with the need to make cutbacks), there is also believed to be limited 'charitable' pots available in their position as a local authority centre. One potential response to be considered by the centre in future to overcome this, is the development of links along the lines of those made between schools and industry.
- 4.7 Whilst Worcestershire schools have previously accessed the centre at a reduced rate relative to non local authority users, from April 2008 all schools have faced the same costs, something which was deemed necessary to help the move to zero funding. As a 'gesture of goodwill', and to ease the transition, the local authority do still fund transport to the centre for its schools with groups of 30 or more (although at this stage this is only guaranteed for the financial year 2008/09). To allow disadvantaged groups to have equality of access, Worcestershire have made a £100k budget available for them to access, although there is no certainty how long this will last.
- 4.8 In future, it is likely charges will have to increase alongside restructuring of staffing and budgets to accommodate the move to zero funding. Another consideration is to

increase the throughput of low-key activities, increasing user-numbers and therefore income, although this is not seen as a good way forward by the centre.

Facilities

- 4.9 Located on a small plot of land, the centre has a residential capacity of 40, which normally allows them to accommodate one school at a time split into 4 groups of 10 to deliver activities. The centre has limited ability to expand provision on the site owing to its location, being situated amongst other non-LA buildings. As a result, facilities such as the dining hall act as a constraint on increasing capacity (particularly on a residential basis).

Staffing structures

- 4.10 The centre currently has 15 staff - which offers a full-time equivalent of 10.4 - including 3 full time (Head of Centre, housekeeper and administrator) and 12 part time (7 teaching and the remainder support staff). The majority of teaching staff are part time due to previous threats over budgets and the need to change working practices – this resulted in a move from 4 full time instructors to 4 part time (thereby halving the full time equivalents without the loss of any jobs).
- 4.11 The teaching staff have historically been paid as teachers/head-teachers, although following a management review in 2003 new appointments were made on instructors rates (Joint Negotiating Committee for Youth and Community Workers scales - JNC). This change has reduced the cost of staff and allowed greater flexibility in operations: as a result there is currently a mixture of contracts. No use is currently made of seasonal staff as the centre has a good distribution of usage throughout the year, although they are currently considering a seasonal post.
- 4.12 Little difficulty in recruiting appropriately skilled staff has been experienced as the centre is believed to be well respected and offers autonomy to staff (within certain parameters), which many view as an appealing way of working. Most staff are multi-skilled and experienced teachers (geography, biology, PE, geology, etc.) and can therefore run an 'activity week' – this makes for a better way of working as the leaders get to know the groups over the week and understand what individual members can and cannot do (what is done each day informs the development of the programme). Education, enrichment, extending and progression are all key themes.
- 4.13 The non-teaching staff are paid according to local authority salary scales.
- 4.14 None of the staff live on site, although there is an on-call system for evenings.

Utilisation and user groups

- 4.15 The centre is open 47 weeks a year for primarily 5 day residential courses: 47 weeks is considered optimal as it allows 2 weeks for Christmas and the fact that the first 3 weeks of each school term are quiet. Throughout the year target occupancy numbers are given for certain weeks, ranging from 36 in some weeks to 30 in others.
- 4.16 The centre is very much seen as serving secondary schools as the prime user group by the local authority although it does have a diverse user base incorporating primary schools, special schools, college courses, teacher courses and secondary schools. Whilst the centre also works with 'targeted groups' (i.e. Pupil Referral Units, etc.) moving to zero budgets may necessitate financial considerations taking precedence over softer, less tangible factors (i.e. outcomes/impacts from attending, etc.) when determining user groups in future – if maintaining such a focus is a proposal of the local authority, there needs to be an acceptance of budget realities.
- 4.17 The centre currently has approx. 60-70% Worcestershire schools usage. Given that Worcestershire fund the centre, they have an interest in who comes through the doors, and whilst there is no explicit directive as to the percentage of local authority users who should have access, Llanrug do recognise that they are a local authority centre and as such endeavour to prioritise accordingly (the local authority do not want to subsidise external users).

Activities and educational programmes

- 4.18 In contrast to many of the commercial providers the centre sees itself as an **Outdoor Education** Centre rather than an **Outdoor Activities** Centre. The centre delivers a whole range of activities (kayaking, canoeing, rock climbing, etc) with the emphasis being on personal and social development: the residential experience is considered an important part in this development. Other areas of delivery include curriculum, field studies and mountain leader training for teachers, amongst others.
- 4.19 As mentioned previously, the fact that the emphasis is on education rather than simply activity potentially adds to the costs of delivery as it requires appropriately qualified individuals for its effective delivery.

Maintenance

- 4.20 Under the current funding regime, the centre pays approximately 1% of its annual budget to the local authority to cover a central 'insurance policy' (in the form of a central recharge to 'Property Services'), and as such maintenance responsibilities rest with the local authority. Maintenance requirements are prioritised according to whether they create a risk if not addressed or whether it would be preferable for

them to be done. Currently there is a slight backlog of requirements in relation to decoration and the roof on one of the buildings – they are on an asset management list to be sorted, and a recent visit to the centre by property services will produce action in some of these areas.

- 4.21 In relation to sustainable initiatives, the centre recycles its waste, and involves students in monitoring energy.

Other issues

- 4.22 The biggest challenge facing the centre is how they will move to zero budgets without decreasing the quality of the service – they need to look closely at how staff and other centre costs impact upon this. Whilst considering this, of the utmost importance is not to compromise on health and safety.
- 4.23 Furthermore, as secondary schools are the current main user-group they accommodate, it has been suggested that the focus on curriculum pressures in secondary education are making it increasingly difficult to get children out of school. Their experience suggests that some schools prefer shorter courses which may be accommodated by centres who are close to their client base, although given that Llanrug is remote from Worcestershire, this will be difficult to meet (particularly in a cost-effective manner as transport becomes a disproportionate cost over a short stay).
- 4.24 Given the non-statutory position of outdoor education, centres such as Llanrug may always be vulnerable to the whims of local government economics – this adds to their uncertainty.

Conway Centre (Cheshire County Council)

Background

- 4.25 Located on the banks of the Menai Straits in Anglesey, and sitting in 170 acres of National Trust land, the Conway Centre was formed from the amalgamation of two other centres under the ownership of Cheshire – the Nelson Centre and the Menai Centre - in 1990. Historically, both Nelson and Menai were heavily subsidised by the local authority and a review of the centres in 1988 suggested a move to a more unified management structure was needed, along with major cuts to the funding available.
- 4.26 Following its creation therefore, the Conway Centre immediately faced massive budgetary cuts, ultimately leading to an announcement in 1988 that charges for the

centre should be set to ensure 'full cost recovery', marking the end of any subsidies from 2001.

- 4.27 The centre has successfully achieved these targets following the appointment of a new Head of Centre in 1994, initially through major cutbacks to the scale of the operation, pruning it back to an efficient size from which it could generate sustainable growth: these included reductions to both staffing numbers and occupancy. Despite the initial cutbacks to the service, the focus remained on achieving the high levels of customer service and satisfaction required to be successful. Over time, as operational efficiency increased, surpluses were generated and reinvested in the development of the centre, thereby creating sustainable growth, and allowing it to reach its current level of operation.

Management

- 4.28 The Head of Centre has been in post since 1994, and has seen the centre through the significant changes it has needed to introduce. Somewhat uniquely in the context of outdoor education centres generally, the Head has a background in teaching rather than outdoor education. The management of the Centre is entirely devolved to the Head.

Financial

- 4.29 Currently, the centre is entirely self-funding, and has been since 2001. In fact, the centre currently contributes £300,000 to the local authority for central services, although it has been suggested that the equivalent services procured from the market would only equate to £190,000, suggesting a net contribution is being made to the local authority. Surpluses over and above this contribution are re-invested by the centre in the same financial year as they are earned.
- 4.30 Suggestions have been made that the centre can be self-funding owing to its scale of operation and the ability to use profitable activities to cross-subsidise less profitable areas. However, such assertions are dismissed by the centre, which strongly believes that all activities must stand up on their own merits (*"it is not fair to charge individuals to support other users activities – what they pay they get back in their course"*).

Facilities

- 4.31 The centre has extensive facilities within its site, both in terms of accommodation and activities available.
- 4.32 Accommodation facilities extend across a number of buildings on the site, and include:

- Main building – accommodates 244 students and 36 staff
- Gogarth – environmentally efficient purpose built accommodation opened in June 2006, accommodating up to 49 students in addition to 4 staff bedrooms
- Penmon – accommodates 41 students in 5 dormitories along with 2 staff bedrooms
- Hafod – accommodates 33 students in 4 dormitories, along with 2 staff bedrooms
- Lafan – accommodates 16 students alongside 2 staff bedrooms.

4.33 In addition to these residential facilities, the centre is located on extensive grounds from which most of the courses can be delivered, as well as having direct access to the Menai Strait.

Staffing structures

4.34 The centre currently employs 10 permanent teaching staff, with seasonal staff used as required. In addition to this, a trainee scheme operates, paying £13,000 per annum, targeted at individuals (teachers) wishing to get into this area of work: half of the time of the trainee is spent teaching/delivering thereby ensuring they cover their own costs. The possible introduction of a 'gap year' position is also being considered (differing from the trainee scheme as the individuals will be gap year students rather than qualified teachers) with half of the time of the individual spent assisting the teaching side, and half undertaking cleaning/domestic work.

4.35 In order to maximise the performance of the centre, it is recognised that there is a need to ensure all members of staff are maximising their added-value (e.g. ensuring teaching staff are teaching rather than being tied up with admin-related work). In order to achieve this with non-teaching staff (i.e. cleaners, handymen, etc) it is planned to replace role-specific job titles with the title 'centre assistant': this will allow greater flexibility in deploying resources and therefore efficiency in operations.

Utilisation and user groups

4.36 The centre is only closed 2 weeks per year (open at all other times, including weekends and summer holidays) and with 400 beds now available, usage of the centre has increased from 38,000 to 54,000 bed nights (32,000 of these are schools within the local authority) since the cuts were made 14/15 years ago. The total bed nights equate to over 18,000 individuals attending the centre each year, plus in excess of 3,000 young people and adults attending day courses.

4.37 A large volume of business for the centre comes from repeat users, many of whom have been using the centre for a number of years. Although no marketing activity is currently undertaken, the centre recognises the need to be commercially viable to

survive (and therefore not rely on subsidies) and as such is constantly reviewing their user base to avoid becoming over-reliant on any one group.

- 4.38 The range of user-groups includes schools, youth groups, local authorities, and corporate groups amongst others. Whilst all **activities** at the centre can be accessed by all user-groups, the **residential** facilities are not available to corporate clients: it is considered inappropriate to accommodate corporate groups alongside school groups, and as such they are required to make separate off-site arrangements.
- 4.39 Whilst local authority users are unlikely to use the facilities of the centre on anything other than a residential basis, given the distance from Cheshire, the centre does offer day courses where required. Much use is made of this by the local community, with good links existing with Coleg Menai, Llandrillo College, etc, for whom elements of the BTEC courses are delivered, alongside other courses such as Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. This aspect of delivery clearly provides a good supplementary source of income.

Activities and educational programmes

- 4.40 All courses offered to visiting schools at the centre are bespoke, working with the schools to ensure the programme exactly matches their need and abilities. The centre can accommodate up to 12 courses at one time, which does pose challenges logistically in terms of what facilities are available and what facilities groups wish to access – it is not simply a case of filling 400 beds each night.
- 4.41 The suite of courses available at the centre are highly diverse, encompassing art, drama, dance, music, science, outdoor education, field studies, cross curricula studies and personal, social and health education. The main focus of all ‘activities’ is on progression, ensuring they start at a level which allows users to build confidence, and therefore does not exclude anyone.
- 4.42 Advisory and training support is also provided to a number of organisations including Cheshire County Council and a number of other authorities.

Maintenance

- 4.43 The centre is responsible for undertaking and financing all of its own maintenance requirements, paid for from fee income: this is an ongoing process to ensure the centre is desirable, functional and more than meets the expectations of its customer base.
- 4.44 The only area in which a backlog of maintenance exists is in relation to dilapidations (as the site is leased from the National Trust on a long-term 30-year lease) that

were inherited when responsibility for the site was taken over from the local authority. However, these have been acknowledged by the local authority as their responsibility to 'make good' prior to handing over all responsibility to the centre. No other maintenance issues are outstanding.

Sustainability initiatives

4.45 The centre is investing extensively in sustainable/environmental initiatives, with major initiatives including the introduction of a reed bed to manage waste and the composting of all food waste for use on site grounds. This has led to the centre being awarded Green Dragon Level 4 status, as well as winning Welsh Business Sustainability Awards.

School User Interviews

4.46 Interviews with visiting group leaders illustrated the high regard in which the centre is held by clients. Whilst the centre is clearly a large business, visiting staff suggested it had the feel of a small friendly centre – they believe the centre values them as a customer, and the size was something they had not previously considered. Overall, the comments were entirely positive, and specific comments included:

- *“Outdoor activities are very well thought out and delivered, appropriately challenging the various levels of ability within groups”*
- *“The staff understand what the kids are about and can suss them out quickly”*
- *“The activities also offer them the opportunity to work as a team and build trust in other people – they get so much out of it”*
- *“The whole package is very well thought out”.*

Current issues

4.47 Recently, the centre has gone through a review to determine whether it should remain within the local authority or be established as a company limited by guarantee. Despite the significant financial contribution made by the centre to the local authority annually, members have voted to establish a limited company as this was deemed to be in the best interests of the children of the area – this is welcomed by the centre.

4.48 The centre recognise that anything which affects user numbers generally is a threat to their future, although they are constantly reviewing the spread of their user groups to prevent them being over reliant on any one area: these potential effects are further mitigated by the range of activities offered. Private providers may also be deemed a possible threat, although they are not considered as being a like-for-like

alternative as the centre considers their advantage stems from the belief that “we can talk education, they can’t”.

Plas Pencelli (Swindon Borough Council)

Background

- 4.49 Located on the outskirts of Brecon, Plas Pencelli operates as part of Swindon Local Authority. Historically the centre was administered by Swindon Borough Council and Wiltshire County Council receiving a large annual contribution to running costs split 50:50 between the two authorities – despite responsibility for all aspects of the centre having resided with Swindon since 1996, Wiltshire continued to fund the centre until 2003, having announced their intention in 2000 to move to a zero budget over 3 years. In the same period the subsidy from Wiltshire ended, Swindon LA announced a similar reduction in their funding to zero over 3 years.
- 4.50 Inevitably problems were initially encountered with the budgetary cuts, particularly in 2003, as although Wiltshire had forewarned the centre of the move to zero funding, there were great difficulties in making up the large shortfall. Consequently, in 2003, the centre faced zero financial assistance from Wiltshire and 2 years later all direct funding from Swindon was lost. Following the appointment of a new Head of Centre at this time, significant changes were introduced at the centre to ensure its ongoing viability, as well as enabling it to meet the testing targets set in moving to a position of self-financing.
- 4.51 These changes resulted in the Head of Centre being the only permanent member of the instruction staff left at the centre in January 2006. Furthermore, alongside this significant decline in the number of permanent staff, alongside a greater reliance on seasonal team members, drastic changes were introduced to the way the centre operates including:
- Remuneration of outdoor education instructional staff previously teachers grades, but now JNC (staff are instructors first and foremost), translating into lower costs
 - Cleaning staff reduced from 3 to 2 and changes made to their way of working
 - Staff multi-task
 - Removal of free transport to the centre for LA schools
 - Changes in work patterns to avoid unproductive periods
- 4.52 These changes have led to the centre breaking even for the last 2 years, as well as enabling it to carry money forward as part of an asset replacement strategy. In order to ensure changes in funding/staffing arrangements do not impact on the

experience offered, the centre undergoes a process of continual development by seeking feedback from all groups attending.

Management

- 4.53 Councillors from both Swindon and Wiltshire are represented on the committee for the centre, despite Wiltshire no longer assuming direct responsibility for the centre.
- 4.54 The day-to-day management of Plas Pencelli is entirely devolved to the Centre Head who has recently been supported through the appointment of a Deputy Head (April 08).

Financial

- 4.55 The centre now considers itself to be 'self-funding', and suggests that "*people know that what they pay for they get in the service – there is no profit made*".
- 4.56 The centre charges £210 per head to Swindon schools and £230 per head to others (08/09). Despite receiving no direct funding from the LA towards running costs, the price charged to users is set by a council committee, potentially impacting on their ability to break-even: research undertaken by the centre suggests they are slightly cheaper than other providers.
- 4.57 The centre has developed a small surplus in recent years, with a view to developing the facilities – investing money in new mini-buses, bedding, curtains, carpets, repairs, etc. However, following the cancellation of a block booking by a school accounting for 5% of bookings the money has now been diverted to annual running costs (n.b. the centre has now put systems in place to ensure they are not at the whim of one school to this extent in future, and is establishing a more diversified client base).

Facilities

- 4.58 Accommodation facilities at the centre are available for 115, with additional space for tents within the grounds.
- 4.59 The facilities for the delivery of activities are almost exclusively off-site – extensive use is made of the natural geography of the area (a perceived advantage over some private providers who it is believed run all of their activities on-site to ensure they are low risk and capable of being run by younger, less experienced staff).

4.60 Current staffing levels at the centre include:

- 1 Head of Centre
- 1 Deputy Head of Centre
- 2 teachers
- 2 assistants
- 2 administrators (job share)
- 1 handyman (temporary)
- 2 cleaners
- 4 catering staff (including 2 part time).

4.61 Instructional staff are paid according to JNC scales, something which is seen as an important detail in a centre of this size as teachers scales are believed to go too high for those staying for many years, giving no incentive for staff to move out of their comfort zone. This does not however suggest using JNC contracts lessens the importance attached to teaching as much use is still made of lesson plans, learning objectives, etc.

4.62 When recruiting staff, it is suggested that it is not just important to have highly skilled staff, but they also need to have the right personality traits. This is an area of operations that the Head of Centre “*loses most sleep over*”, as it would be very easy if they took anyone, but the reality is that it is fairly hard to get the right staff. All instructional staff are well qualified and if they are not qualified in an activity they will not run that specific aspect of a course (the centre will pay to get staff qualified and value staff seeking professional development very highly – a £3k annual training budget is available).

4.63 An assistant scheme is run by the centre, which is a 1-year opportunity for a school leaver looking to work in this environment. The key features of this are:

- The position is advertised through Swindon and Wiltshire schools, and potentially successful candidates are invited to attend a weeks trial, allowing all staff to assess their suitability
- The individual gets a room, funded training and a reasonable salary for the year
- Given that no members of staff live on site, the assistant fulfils a vital security role at the centre at night
- The assistants also spend 1 day a week at the centre helping with maintenance
- The assistants are there to help with delivery, but do **not** lead on activities.

- 4.64 Changes to the staffing and working arrangements for domestic staff has helped cost cutting, with pupils now making their own beds and cleaning dorms during residence rather than centre staff (this also adds to the personal and social development of those attending the centre). These changes have enabled the centre to operate on 2 cleaning staff rather than 3, despite increased numbers through the centre.

Activities and educational programmes

- 4.65 Personal development is key to the activities at the centre, with the ethos revolving around educating and influencing children in a positive manner. The range of activities available includes hill walking, caving, canoeing, mountain biking, rock climbing, etc. In addition to these day activities, a range of evening activities is run by centre staff.
- 4.66 Integration of teachers with the programme is a minimum requirement as their integration with the children is an important outcome of the experience.
- 4.67 A holistic approach is taken to the delivery of any course, ensuring they meet the needs of the groups from the perspective of content, as well as focusing on getting peripheral issues right (e.g. group make up, dietary requirements, etc.).

Utilisation and user groups

- 4.68 Whilst Plas Pencelli advertises for 50 weeks of the year, demand dictates when the centre will be open, recognising that the site needs some down time, as do the staff. The main focus of the marketing effort is directly targeted towards schools, primarily those within the local authority catchment area: servicing the needs of schools is where the centre sees its strengths and it therefore believes it is best to concentrate on this user group.
- 4.69 For many reasons the centre acknowledges it is not tailored to meet the needs of certain other markets. With respect to the corporate market for example, opportunities may be limited due to expectations over accommodation needs – the centre aims to meet the minimum standards of a 1* hotel (essentially nice, clean and comfortable for visiting groups).

Maintenance

- 4.70 Swindon Local Authority owns the building and funds the capital investment, although maintenance is the responsibility of the centre. This can create problems however, as it can be difficult establishing a clear dividing line between capital investment and maintenance.

- 4.71 The priorities attached to completing capital investment works are such that any issues that threaten health and safety are corrected immediately by the local authority (e.g. recently repaired fire escape) whereas less ‘critical’ areas are not a high priority amongst other local authority spending (e.g. windows have been awaiting replacement for 3 years – although the windows are clearly less of a priority, they are still deemed important by the centre to maintain them to be able to sell a ‘nice’ centre).

Other Issues

- 4.72 The centre is increasingly threatened by charges for using external sites (forestry, etc.) which currently costs £3,000 per annum, although these are free to members of the general public (e.g. Forest Enterprise sites).
- 4.73 Sustainable running initiatives are not currently employed at the centre as they are deemed cost prohibitive: Brecon council for example charge for collecting recycling (50p per bag). The centre is in the early stages of its zero funding, and as such this is not possible at the moment, although it is something that is going to be considered in future (this will need to be considered to be able to get a ‘green flag’ for the centre on the website).
- 4.74 Excessive regulation is also seen as posing a threat to the future of the centre
- 4.75 The centre does not feel threatened by the local authority given their financial position, whereas other subsidised centres may be threatened at the moment: it was suggested that theoretically other centres should be able to operate in a similar way to that introduced at Plas Pencelli. Despite this ‘security’, it was noted that during the last foot and mouth crisis the centre was able to survive due to the financial support received from the local authority – should a similar event arise in future it is unclear what would happen if this support wasn’t available.

Visiting group feedback

- 4.76 Members of staff from the visiting (Wiltshire) school commented upon the long-standing relationship their school had with the centre, and how the courses and facilities “*suit their needs perfectly*”. Good links had clearly been maintained despite the centre moving under the sole responsibility of Swindon. Furthermore, they suggested that the visit to Plas Pencelli was an important aspect of education, and something which was shared with a lot of people, of different generations, throughout the local authority.
- 4.77 Overall, the centre was seen as being “*very well organised*” and “*very efficient*” and it was also stated that “*we have been coming here as a school for a long time and will continue to do so in the future*”.

Background

- 4.78 The 'Caldecotte Xperience' in Milton Keynes was opened 16 years ago, having being purpose-built (and financed) by the Development Corporation undertaking the development of the city. Despite already owning an outdoor education centre in Sedbergh, Cumbria, when the opportunity arose the authority welcomed the chance to have such a facility on their doorstep. The centre is operated and owned as a partnership between the Youth Service (Action for Youth) and the Milton Keynes Council.
- 4.79 Milton Keynes is going through a considerable period of targeted growth as an authority area, resulting in a new secondary school having been built in the authority for each of the last 3 years, increasing the potential 'in-authority' user base significantly.
- 4.80 Despite this apparently strong position, the centre did "*come to the top of the chopping block*" in 2003, although in practice it was difficult to achieve owing to 2 primary factors, namely:
- The Development Corporation built a covenant into the centre when it was handed over to the local authority, requiring the land be used as a youth centre – this would not make it a commercially attractive sale opportunity (as was desired by the local authority to gain revenue)
 - The local authority would have had to buy the youth service out of the partnership which was an additional unforeseen cost.
- 4.81 The centre has also previously been 'under threat' of being transferred to a charitable trust, although this did not progress, which is seen as allowing it to retain its educational aims rather than more commercial ones. Whilst charitable status would have some advantages (e.g. it would be easier employing staff as this is taken over by central services currently, removal of reporting for cabinet which currently takes much time, etc.), remaining in the local authority is considered advantageous, due to:
- Funding received
 - Security of centre
 - Ability to provide for disadvantaged groups without having to worry about commercial opportunities.

- 4.82 One possible explanation for these threats is the fact that Caldecotte has a large commercial centre within 4 miles, causing some council members to question why an apparent 'duplication' is required – this position is exacerbated by the fact that Caldecotte is subsidised by the local authority whilst the commercial centre generates rates revenue, etc. (Caldecotte do not however see themselves as being in competition with commercial providers as they recognise they are unable to service all schools within the local authority alone).
- 4.83 Recently, in an effort to ensure a secure future for the centre (as far as possible), a major consultation exercise was undertaken with heads of schools, the findings from which were collated by independent consultants. The aim of the exercise was to show the council that they do get value for money, and when presented to the council the findings were accepted without question, with much value attached to the work undertaken with disadvantaged children.

Management

- 4.84 The operational management on a day-to-day basis is devolved to the Head of Centre, who reports to the Assistant Director (Leisure, Learning, and Culture) within the Learning and Development Directorate. Strategic decisions are taken by the management committee which has significant local authority representation: 6 council members sit on it (3 of whom are elected members) along with 6 representatives of the youth service.
- 4.85 Having local authority involvement in the management is believed to be a strength of the management set-up, as it offers a direct voice to take the message into the heart of the council.

Financial

- 4.86 The centre receives significant funding from the local authority on an annual basis, although over time this has decreased as a percentage of total costs from 100% coverage 16 years ago to the current level of 50%. Despite being a targeted area of growth, the local authority is suggested to be under strong financial pressure for 2 primary reasons:
1. The local authority does not have the asset base of other authorities as assets have been transferred into specific trusts throughout the development of the area (all of the parks, for example, have been set up under the ownership of a trust with the revenue from this not therefore going to the LA)
 2. Central government funding is based on out-of-date statistics in an area of rapid population growth.

- 4.87 As a result of these forces, the local authority has been forced down the partnership route, operating the centre in partnership with the Youth Service, the financial benefits of which are clear: as a charity, the youth partnership undertake all necessary fundraising to supplement the income of the centre – this has allowed the centre to realise many benefits, including the services of a local accountant on a fortnightly basis, and a recent donation of gym equipment by a local building company. The centre exemplifies the benefits of strong partnership working.
- 4.88 In addition to this, the centre also receives ‘Section 106 funds’, which requires those developing the city to contribute to a central pot of funds for every ‘x’ houses built, which is then invested in community facilities. The centre was recently awarded £25,000 for their water sports centre from this pot.
- 4.89 Any surpluses accumulated by the centre are initially allocated to any maintenance needs (over and above those covered by the local authority), with remaining surpluses transferred to a development fund, which is used to help the business in the long term – the centre has a 10 year development plan for replacing equipment.

Facilities

- 4.90 The centre offers both residential and day courses for a wide range of beneficiaries, with accommodation at the centre comprising dormitory facilities for up to 30 residents, as well as the potential for up to 100 tents to be pitched within the grounds.
- 4.91 Extensive facilities are available on-site, including a wide range of water-based activities, a climbing wall, a purpose-built caving system, archery facilities and personal development/team-working activities.
- 4.92 Caldecotte has also benefited from its location within a city targeted for growth, having had their purpose-built caving system financed and constructed by English Partnership (EP) – the partnership developing the area. EP were looking to ‘dispose’ of excavated land, which the centre took as part of an agreement to build a caving system – the project was financed by EP and was completed in 2 years (financing the project was cheaper for EP than disposing of the land). Following this the centre have signalled to EP their wish to build a Mountain Board course, and as such when there is a requirement to dispose of more land again this will be put in place.
- 4.93 In striving to deliver top-class facilities, as well as accommodating increasing demand for certain activities, the centre is currently considering an application for £5 million of lottery funding for the development of their water sports centre, which is currently too small for their needs: should the application be unsuccessful the centre will seek alternative funding (the Parks Trust – agents for Anglia Water who

own the water park area – have expressed a willingness to fund it, although this is likely to lead to a significant increase in ground rent, which is not the preferred option).

Staffing

- 4.94 The centre employs 20 staff, resulting in a full time equivalent of 13.2, and also benefits from a large number of volunteers, particularly in relation to weekend water sports activities. The vast majority of the staff are delivery staff, most of whom are multi-skilled and able to lead on a number of different activities – all staff are very highly skilled.
- 4.95 It is suggested that it can be hard getting good quality instructors, although the centre recognises the staff they currently have are all very good – most employees have been at the centre for a long time. In order to attract the right calibre of applicants to work at the centre, slightly higher than average salaries are offered. Attracting teachers for instructional staff is considered preferable by the centre, as there is an understanding of educational principles – the centre is there in its capacity as an Outdoor **Education** Centre primarily, not an Outdoor **Activity** Centre.
- 4.96 When the centre first started, JNC pay scales were used as they were part of youth services, although few applicants were forthcoming when posts were vacated. As a result, this was abolished, with employees now on local authority pay scales (not teaching) except the Head of Centre, who has remained on a teaching scale since taking over at the centre: this gives all staff the pension rights of the council.
- 4.97 Whilst the centre currently makes little use of seasonal/casual staff, this was not previously the case: changes in European Employment legislation (meaning long term seasonal staff had essentially the same employment rights as full time staff) resulted in an increase in the numbers of full time staff. This change in focus was also accommodated by the calendar of activities becoming less seasonal, with most activities being offered all year round.

Utilisation and user groups

- 4.98 The main user group is local authority schools (approximately 95%), and priority is given to these ‘affiliated’ schools, although some schools are accepted from outside the local authority. Non-affiliated schools face charges twice the level of affiliated schools, which, given the relative usage of the centre, makes it hard to operate as a commercial entity.
- 4.99 As well as focussing on schools, a lot of work is also undertaken with Young People Out Of School (YPOS) Pupil Referral Units PRU) to engage excluded children with

learning: the aim is to “*seduce them with exciting activities*”. A small amount of corporate work is taken on (primarily for the council), although this is considered to be something the centre has up its sleeve should the need arise in future. The centre also engages with freelance consultants to allow them to essentially rent the facilities for their own delivery – the consultant is then able to get business in and run sessions.

Maintenance

- 4.100 As part of the funding allocated by the local authority, £2,000 is available for maintenance purposes: although this represents a fairly modest sum relative to other centres the fact that Caldecotte is a relatively ‘new build’ means this does not pose any problems currently as maintenance requirements are relatively low. Furthermore, the centre also has a caretaker who looks after the small issues on site.
- 4.101 Any maintenance requirements over and above the £2,000 budget will be financed by the surplus income generated (not the development fund).

Other issues

- 4.102 Overall, the centre feel ‘very positive’ about the future, particularly in view of the conclusions and recommendations emanating from the review conducted by independent consultants. The main concern for the future relates to ‘access for all’ as outdoor education is considered a lottery in Milton Keynes, heavily reliant upon the enthusiasm of the teachers within the schools, and as such there is not necessarily equality of opportunity. It is suggested that the demand for outdoor education should be more organised, something which is believed to have been strengthened since OFSTED began reporting on it.

Hampshire Mountain Centre (Hampshire County Council)

Background

- 4.103 Hampshire Mountain Centre (also known as Argoed Lwyd) is located close to the village of Libanus, on the outskirts of Brecon in the Brecon Beacons.
- 4.104 The centre enjoys strong support from the local authority and is one of 3 outdoor education centres owned by the authority, although the centre tends to be used more for adventurous activities than curriculum/ field based ones. It also offers bespoke courses.

Management

4.105 The centre comes under the remit of the Department of Leisure and Tourism. The Head of Centre is line managed by the Outdoor Education Officer and the local authority also employs an Outdoor Advisor who sets policy regarding outdoor education for the whole authority. The education department has client status and the centre is almost classed as an individual cost centre.

Financial

4.106 The centre receives a subsidy of £65,000 from the local authority; however the majority of its income comes from visiting schools. The centre's overall running costs are approximately £200,000 per annum. Any profit made by the centre has to be invested back into the centre in the same financial year.

Facilities

4.107 The centre has 46 beds and one Disability Discrimination Act compliant room. The centre also has a classroom/ conference room and drying facilities.

4.108 The centre has two kitchens and is self catering and visiting groups are expected to bring and cook their own food. The centre's main dining room has recently been refurbished (funded by the Department of Recreation and Heritage).

Staffing

4.109 The centre employs:

- 1 Head of Centre
- 3 full time instructors (one of whom is also the Head of Centre)
- 1 full time maintenance; and
- 1 part time administrator.

4.110 Staff are on local authority terms and conditions. All of the centre's positions were recently evaluated resulting in some significant changes in employment terms. Up until April 2007 salaries included weekend work and being on call in the evenings, under the new conditions work outside core hours is subject to a higher rate of pay and 'time off in lieu'.

4.111 Recruitment can be difficult due to the lack of on-site accommodation and high cost of living in the area.

Activities and education programmes

4.112 The centre offers a range of adventure and educational activities including caving, canoeing, walking and bespoke curriculum courses for Key Stage 2 to A Level. It also offers Duke of Edinburgh activities and National Governing Board training and assessments.

Utilisation and user groups

4.113 The centre is open 7 days a week year round with visits split into Monday to Friday and Friday to Sunday – generally non school groups. Approximately 5,500 to 6,000 visitors use the centre each year. The centre's occupancy rates are approximately 60 – 65%.

4.114 The biggest user groups are Year 6's. Visits by certain age groups tends to be seasonal and dependent on the academic time table e.g.: between February and March juniors; April to May post 16s and colleges; June to July – secondary pupils. The centre is also used by a number of special schools.

4.115 The centre manager admits that they do face some competition from private providers - particularly because the centre is self catering and requires visiting teachers to be more involved in activities than private providers. However they feel this approach is better for teachers building relationships with children that can be sustained when they return to school.

Maintenance

4.116 Maintenance is the local authority's responsibility and they contract with suppliers accordingly. The centre manager did comment however that increasingly responsibility for maintenance is increasingly being passed on to the centre.

4.117 Having undergone some recent refurbishment little in the way of major maintenance is required for the centre. The centre is currently seeking planning permission for building storage.

Other issues

4.118 The centre benefits from the significant marketing efforts of the local authority in selling the benefits of outdoor education centre visits to schools and other groups in the county. The Department for Recreation and Tourism publishes a termly newsletter for its outdoor service in which the Centre and others often feature. The Department also recently held an 'Outdoor Fair' targeted at schools and other county groups, at which the centre exhibited. The authority also operates its own

insurance scheme providing reassurance and backing for teachers leading visits to its centres.

- 4.119 The Head of Centre commented that AALA is seen to be good for the industry in terms of improving standards particularly amongst private providers. It also gives parents more confidence. Local authority centres are seen to have always had good inspections, policies and processes in relation to outdoor education
- 4.120 In addition the increased tightening of AALA licensing requirements has seen a trend towards local authority outdoor centres. Previously teachers would often run their own activities however local authorities have become risk averse and favour sending children to activity centres.

Ghyll Head (Manchester City Council)

Background

- 4.121 Ghyll Head is located on the banks of Lake Windermere, approximately 2 miles from the town of Windermere. Manchester City Council has run an outdoor education centre from Ghyll Head since 1967.

Management

- 4.122 The centre comes under the remit of Manchester's Local Education Authority which covers 180 schools, 22 of which are secondary schools. Ghyll Head is Manchester's only outdoor education centre.

Financial

- 4.123 Up until April 2008 the centre received approximately £210,000 in subsidy from the local authority. The centre has been under intermittent threat since the late 1990s, and is currently under review as part of the Manchester Improvement Programme.
- 4.124 The review process by external consultants began in September 2006. Recommendations went out to schools for consultation that the centre should be run by an external commercial provider and that it should compete with other provision in the market place. There was a massive response from schools stating how much the experiences at Ghyll Head were valued and how they feared that the bespoke nature and quality of the courses would be lost under a commercial system of management.
- 4.125 Under the latest proposals the subsidy paid to Ghyll Head will be removed a general pool of money created of approximately £420,000 to subsidise residential outdoor education. Schools will be able to down money to fund trips to a centre of

their choosing i.e. not necessarily Ghyll Head. The finer detail of how this fund is distributed has not yet been worked out.

- 4.126 The centre is also currently under consideration for conversion to Charitable Trust status. The Head of Centre is uncertain about these proposals with the feeling that this will distance the centre from the local authority and councillors and citizens of Manchester will lose the sense of ownership they have over Ghyll Head – *“lose hearts and minds”* and as a result decision making about the centre will be affected.
- 4.127 The Head of Centre commented that the majority of centres operating as charitable trusts are well established and have a cash reserve to use if necessary. In its current status Ghyll Head would have to rely on the financial support of the local authority if it didn't achieve income targets. The major concern is that the centre is not big enough to be financially viable and would be unable to maintain the current quality of provision.
- 4.128 Conversion to Charitable Trust status is seen to have some advantages, for example it would allow the centre to access grants that it is not currently eligible for.

Facilities

- 4.129 Ghyll Head has two residential facilities: the main house which has 46 beds; and a separate bungalow which has 13 beds.
- 4.130 In 2000/2001 the centre received £329,000 funding to develop what was the Head of Centre's bungalow into a small educational facility separate to the main centre. This has allowed the centre to:
- Provide focussed courses for small groups e.g. those with learning difficulties, behaviour difficulties, youth at risk, gifted and talented, revision sessions etc
 - Provide fully DDA compliant facilities.
- 4.131 This facility has been a great success and popular with teachers particularly in terms of allowing for smaller, easier to supervise groups.
- 4.132 There are no plans to increase the residential capacity of either facility given the lack of public space available.
- 4.133 The centre is fully catered. The need to reduce costs in the late 1980's means that there is no night time supervision by centre staff.

Staffing

4.134 Ghyll Head employs:

- 1 Head of Centre
- 1 part time Deputy Head of Centre
- 5 teaching staff (including Head and Deputy Head; 1 vacant post); and
- 6 cleaning and catering staff (1 vacant post).

4.135 The two vacant posts are likely to be filled following the outcomes of the review.

4.136 Teaching staff are required to cover all activities and are allocated a group of students to supervise for the duration of their visit, thereby allowing a better rapport to be built up with the young people. Visiting teachers are part of the group.

4.137 The centre also employs approximately 700 days of freelancers (3 full time equivalents). Often they need to book freelance staff up to 3 months in advance however they can draw on a retired member of staff if necessary.

4.138 As a well established centre, Ghyll Head is considered a popular place to work amongst freelance instructors. The centre places an emphasis on recruiting experienced personnel with at least 5 years prior experience of working with young people in the outdoors.

4.139 Ancillary staff are employed on local government paycales and terms and conditions. Staffing costs have experienced a significant increase following a job evaluation exercise for the catering/ cleaning and maintenance staff.

4.140 There have been recent issues regarding the teaching staff paycales. Staff were traditionally employed on Further Education lecturer paycales meaning that non teaching staff could be employed. However during the 1990's these paycales failed to keep up with the rises in teaching salaries meaning by 2001 the Head of Centre was being paid significantly less than someone on an upper payscale in a secondary school. As a result in 2003 the teaching staff were transferred to teaching paycales – fortunately most staff had a PGCE.

4.141 The centre's management has decided that while qualified teachers are desirable they regard other skills as more desirable. Currently 0.5 of the Deputy Head of Centre post is vacant. A member of staff who is not a qualified teacher is currently being paid an 'acting up' salary because although he was appointed to the post the City Council say he cannot be paid on the Leadership scale which is paid to the other 0.5 post-holder. This is not a permanent solution and needs to be dealt with as part of a review in the near future. There was some acknowledgement that

conversion to Charitable Trust status may overcome this and other bureaucratic issues.

Activities and educational programmes

- 4.142 The bungalow tends to offer more bespoke, focussed courses often linking curriculum work directly with the activities. The last two winters have seen groups of year 9 science pupils from 8 schools taking part in two night courses linking outdoor activities and science revision for SATS.
- 4.143 The main house offers a combination of adventure (canoeing, orienteering, abseiling etc) and academic activities. Most courses have as their primary focus the aim of increasing self confidence through achieving success in the mental and physical challenges posed by the activities in the outdoors. Alongside this there is an emphasis on caring, sharing and tolerance with groups working together as teams. Some courses also have specific curriculum content e.g. science and storytelling course – including a visit to Wordsworth’s cottage, a science experiment and video making; and John Muir Award Courses.
- 4.144 Ghyll Head sees itself as an outdoor **education** centre rather than an outdoor **activity** centre. The relatively small size of the visiting groups means that there is a family atmosphere which can engender a feeling of trust and team spirit. The centre staff feel that this is a key part of working with challenging pupils from the inner city. For that same reason one instructor stays with a group for the duration of their stay leading them through each of the activities and creating a sense of development.

Utilisation and User Groups

- 4.145 The centre is officially open 49 weeks a year but doesn’t shut for any particular periods.
- 4.146 The centre does not actively market outside the local authority however it does receive a number of ‘outside groups’ mainly as a result of word of mouth (e.g. former City of Manchester teachers who have moved outside the local authority). These include: a private school in Huddersfield, a hospital young diabetics group and Knowsley FE College (who in 2007/2008 brought in a considerable amount of income. Self catering groups have often booked the bungalow and the main house over the festive and New Year period. In the last financial year the Centre achieved 78% occupancy²¹, broken down as follows:

²¹ This was based on the calculation of 47 beds (House 35, Bungalow 12) x 6nts x 49 weeks

- Bungalow – 68% Manchester users
- Main house – 86% Manchester users

- 4.147 In their original recommendations the consultants suggested that the centre open Sunday nights: however this would have resulted in additional costs for pupils with very little to be gained from having an additional night in the centre. The idea of courses starting on Sunday evening was also very unpopular with teachers who would lose a day of their weekend break.
- 4.148 Changes to the secondary school curriculum and the pressure to raise academic standards together with a reduction in subsidy have also provided challenges to Ghyll Head (and probably common to many other centres). According to the Head of Centre, over the last 15 years a generation of teachers has missed out on the availability of in-service training in outdoor education and opportunities to take part in residential visits with pupils. There is now seen to be a lack of experienced teachers within the schools. Another factor specific to Manchester is the high turnover of young staff within the schools which makes it difficult to establish a tradition of residential visits within the schools.
- 4.149 The Head of Centre stated that there is a tremendous need to enhance the curriculum for inner city children to broaden their horizons and give them experience of life outside the City. There are very high levels of deprivation within Manchester Schools and Ghyll Head's staff stated that for many pupils their visit to the centre is one of the most memorable events of their time in education and as such it is a very powerful learning experience.
- 4.150 Final arrangements for distributing the subsidy from the Residential Outdoor Education Fund are still to be decided. Current feeling is that the subsidy should be available to all groups of young people up to 19 yrs from the City rather than restricting the subsidy to schools. The centre does some effective work with young people from various youth projects and the Head of Centre feels that it would be unfair to remove the subsidy from these organisations, though potentially head teachers could object to education funding being used to subsidise youth provision.
- 4.151 It is intended that Ghyll Head should charge a cost recovery rate but that the cost to pupils would remain approximately the same as it is at the present time. Presently all Manchester pupils pay the same course fee and there is no reduction for pupils on free school meals. One idea being considered is that schools which have the highest percentage of pupils on free school meals should receive a higher rate of subsidy from the fund. Currently a lot of those schools increase the subsidy to pupils by using funds from the school budget or through fund raising initiatives.

Lanehead (Middlesbrough, Stockton on Tees, Redcar and Cleveland, Hartlepool Borough Councils)

Background

- 4.152 Lanehead, located on the banks of Coniston Water in Cumbria, was established as an outdoor education centre in 1969 under the former County Council of Cleveland. In 1996 Cleveland was divided into the four unitary authorities of Middlesbrough, Stockton on Tees, Redcar & Cleveland, and Hartlepool.
- 4.153 The four authorities also fund another outdoor education centre 'Carlton Outdoors' located in Cleveland and managed by Hartlepool. Carlton is the main provider of activities for primary schools in the four authorities.

Management

- 4.154 The centre is managed by Middlesbrough Borough Council on behalf of the four authorities and is seen to be very supportive – with a “*pro outdoor education*” officer in post in the Department for Education. However, there is the concern that changes in personnel could affect support for the centre. However no one is seen to have any ‘high level’ knowledge of outdoor education in the local authority and as such the centre is very much left to manage itself guided by its annual management plan. The outdoor education coordinators in Redcar and Cleveland are also supportive of the centre.

Financial

- 4.155 Three of the four authorities fund the centre £280,000 per annum and usage allocation is split accordingly. Stockton does not provide any funding to the centre but does still part own the centre. Funding is generally seen to be secure. However at a recent joint arrangement meeting Redcar failed to commit any funding.
- 4.156 The centre’s weekly break even figure is £8,500. In recent years a number of the authorities have reduced their funding and therefore their weekly allocation. Lanehead are still obliged to sell these weeks to non authority users at the same rate that the four authorities would pay and as such the centre has no opportunity to reduce the per week price even out of season or at short notice.

Facilities

- 4.157 The centre has 36 bed spaces (including 4 allocated for staff) and one DDA compliant room with a bed for a carer as well. The centre offers both self catered (holiday and weekend groups ‘buy in’ to catering and activities) and catered visits

(term time). There are several communal facilities including a briefing room, library and a recently built out house which can be used as a games and briefing room.

Staffing

4.158 The centre is staffed by:

- 1 Head of Centre
- 1 Deputy Head of Centre
- 1 full time and 1 part time cook;
- 1 part time administrator
- 1.5 full time teachers
- 1 term time assistant instructor
- 2 part time cleaners.

4.159 Staff are paid according to Middlesbrough paycales and terms and conditions.

4.160 The Head of Centre has experienced no major problems in recruiting teaching/instructing staff, however finding quality staff can sometimes be problematic. They often have problems recruiting domestic staff as they have to compete with tourist accommodation providers.

Activities and education programmes

4.161 The centre focuses on personal and social development using outdoor activities such as canoeing, climbing, caving etc as a medium. The centre also offers skills based courses for young people and adults as well as GNVQ and GCSE courses.

Utilisation and user groups

4.162 The centre has to be open as much as possible to achieve its target income. 29 of the 38 weeks are allocated to authority users. 'Selling' non-authority allocated weeks has become a major part of the Head of Centre's job.

4.163 Staff are employed on term time only contracts, however supervision of groups outside term time is catered for by splitting hours and staff good will. During the week the centre's staff are responsible for running activities (one member of staff will also do an overnight stay each night).

4.164 Middlesbrough Borough Council mainly sends its secondary schools, PRUs and special needs pupils to Lanehead. Primary schools in all four local authorities tend to go to 'Carlton Outdoors'. The more affluent schools in Redcar and Cleveland are also the centre's major user groups. Recipients of free school meals in all four authorities are entitled to a visit free of charge. The Head of Centre commented

that there are a number of City Academies across the four local authorities who could be a good potential market; however, they are not funded by the education department so are reluctant to come.

- 4.165 The centre does receive a number of 'non authority' groups, particularly in holidays and weekends, for example at the time of CRG's visit a group from Haringey were booked in for a visit.

Maintenance

- 4.166 Maintenance needs at the centre are currently minimal due to a considerable re-development and upgrading in 2005 part-funded by the National Lottery (approx £195,000 from sports fund) and the four authorities. The centre has received considerable updating to washing facilities for visitors and drying facilities for equipment; facilities for disabled people have been greatly improved; and a separate games/ activities out house has been built. The current annual maintenance budget is £10,000.
- 4.167 The centre has also received £50,000 from Rural Regeneration Cumbria under the criteria '*making jobs in the [Cumbria's] local authority*'. Funding has also been received from Greenhouse Fund to buy some mountain bikes. In future they would like to fund a toilet block for the outhouse.

5 Key Themes

Introduction

5.1 Drawing on the information collected from the 'Key Informant' interviews, Local Authority Telephone Survey, Centre Survey and Centre Case Studies a number of key themes can be identified related to the funding, management and operation of outdoor centres and the outdoor education sector more widely:

- Long-term sustainability of local authority outdoor provision
- Attracting users
- Management issues

Long-term Sustainability of Local Authority Outdoor Provision

5.2 The vast majority of centres are still subsidised, although the amount of subsidy provided by local authorities differs considerably. While it appears that very few centres are under threat of immediate closure there are increasing moves for centres to go self funding within the next 5 years due to budgetary pressures on non statutory services. For some centres conversion to charitable trust status is under consideration. In the case of both conversion to self funding or charitable trust the fear for most centres is that they will lose the current sense of 'ownership' held by their respective local authorities leading to a decline in understanding and support for them.

5.3 Uncertainty about funding presents issues for the centres themselves and for the confidence schools need to have to forward plan visits and integrate them into their curriculum activity. Uncertainty breeds uncertainty.

5.4 There is a fear in some centres that survival in the competitive market may depend on them abandoning their traditional ethos and operating more like private providers and adopting some of the following practices:

- Compromising 'quality' of provision for 'quantity'
- Recruitment of less skilled and experienced staff
- Less bespoke curriculum activities
- Less equality of provision e.g. removal of free school meal subsidies etc.

- 5.5 However, smaller centres that cannot generate the “*economies of scale*” necessary will face difficulties in implementing the competitive business model needed to survive. This may present some opportunities for joint/ shared working to achieve these “*economies of scale*” or for rationalisation which makes better use of existing resources.
- 5.6 However there is also confidence that if funding was sustainable, these issues could be overcome. In many cases investment has already led to better occupancy (and income) and, arguably, a better “*offer*” to schools.

Attracting Users

- 5.7 While most local authorities appear to encourage and often subsidise their schools to use their centres it is not mandatory. Although the Manifesto raises the profile of the outdoor centres, it falls short of mandating schools to send pupils or to give entitlement to take part in their activities.
- 5.8 The three main drivers which persuade schools **not** to patronise centres are:
- Cost
 - Risk
 - A landscape dominated by the needs of the curriculum.
- 5.9 Centres say that schools find private providers cheaper than unsubsidised local authority provision. Also by providing a complete package of care, in which school staff have little involvement, they are seen to be relieving the school of risk burden. Most centres would claim to be more curriculum focussed than private providers, but first they have to persuade schools that there are valid alternatives to the classroom.
- 5.10 Centres have had to become flexible in order to achieve capacity targets. Shorter 2 – 3 day visits have become increasingly popular and many centres have accommodated them, although this has led to challenges in terms of filling the ‘spare’ days. This problem is compounded by the transport costs associated with out of county centres.
- 5.11 There is an underlying belief that, if some of the fears of schools could be overcome, there is a very strong latent demand.

Management Issues

Payscales

- 5.12 Since the late 1990's centres have experienced an increase in salary costs. The requirement for many instructors to have PGCE's means that they are now paid considerably higher teacher salaries. Furthermore, in most centres all staff are paid according to local authority terms and conditions. Given the nature of outdoor centre operation i.e. evening and weekend working is common - in more recent times this had led to higher costs relating to *'Time off in Lieu'* and over time payment.
- 5.13 Many centres reported a decline in staffing numbers due to these rising costs and as outlined below in more detail many Heads of Centres play duplicate roles as both instructor and manager to save money which means they have had less time to develop the centre in the long term.
- 5.14 If salary costs are to continue increasing in the light of declining subsidies, many centres could be left with no option but to employ cheaper and less experienced staff and increased numbers of sessional/ seasonal staff which could compromise the quality of provision.
- 5.15 However, there are many examples of centres adopting flexible staffing patterns (part time, seasonal) and producing quality provision.

Marketing

- 5.16 Centres have increasingly recognised the need to adopt a 'business' approach to both the day to day and strategic management of the centres. Competition from private providers and the reluctance of some schools to undertake trips has meant that Centre Managers have been increasingly dedicating their time to business development activity, in particular visiting schools and exhibiting at conferences.
- 5.17 However in some centres this has proved problematic – the combination of increased salaries and decreased funding has meant that Heads of Centres are often required to fulfil duplicate roles of both instructor and manager, leaving little time for business planning and development.
- 5.18 A more certain future could give greater confidence that time spent on these other activities is a good investment.

6 Policy Considerations and Implications

Introduction

- 6.1 This study has mapped the scope and extent of local authority outdoor education provision and, together with in depth interviews with Heads of Centres and specific centre case studies, a number of key themes and issues have been identified and discussed. These themes generate considerable opportunities for future policy and practice, particularly relating to the development of the LOtC manifesto.
- 6.2 Before considering these policy considerations, it must be noted that although the findings from this study provide a comprehensive resource and body of knowledge - local authority provision is only one element of the market place. Substantial **gaps in knowledge** exist regarding the scope and extent of the rest of the sector i.e. outdoor learning and activities provided by private companies, trusts and religious organisations. Further work to undertake a similar mapping study with non local authority providers would complement this study and provide the DCSF with a full picture on the current state of the sector.
- 6.3 There are also **gaps in user information** in terms of schools awareness and attitudes to outdoor education provision, how they access it and what informs the decisions they make regarding the type of provision they access. We have already touched on some of the perceived factors influencing schools and teachers in accessing outdoor provision e.g. fears of risks associated with outdoor activities, reluctance to disrupt the academic calendar etc. Gaining knowledge on what and who influences decision making in schools would also assist developing the manifesto so it is 'fit' for future policy and practice.

Developing the LOtC Manifesto

- 6.4 The Manifesto is widely welcomed but without provisions for entitlement, cost or resources it is seen to be ineffectual in influencing change in a local authority decision making climate where non statutory services such as outdoor education provision are liable to suffer due to budgetary pressures.
- 6.5 Should the Manifesto be developed for the future it needs to be strengthened and its messages reinforced at local authority level – to both officers and members and in schools and teaching unions. The perceived risks of outdoor visits both in terms of accidents (and subsequent) litigation and taking learners out of the curriculum are deeply embedded while the benefits of outdoor experiences both academically and personally are not strongly conveyed enough.

Softer Outcomes

- 6.6 Outdoor education has suffered from the emphasis on harder measures of educational attainment over softer outcomes. While the personal and social development benefits of taking young people to outdoor centres are recognised informally, they are still seen as secondary to academic benefits.
- 6.7 Outdoor education needs to be developed in the context of other government initiatives and social concerns. Outdoor learning experiences have the potential to contribute to healthy living and environmental agendas as well as initiatives to reduce anti social behaviour. In particular, the areas where access to outdoor experiences is most limited – both financially and geographically – inner cities, are the areas whose inhabitants are most likely to be targeted by such policy agendas.

Building on Licensing

- 6.8 The licensing of outdoor provision is seen as beneficial; in particular it has helped improve the confidence of local authorities and teachers in accessing it. This confidence must be built on – fears of litigation and the burden of paperwork associated with outdoor visits are still prevalent.
- 6.9 The proposed National Quality Badge for outdoor education providers will help develop the image of the sector but it will be important to ensure that it is meaningful and stands for something.
- 6.10 The Manifesto has given a boost in confidence for the sector in that it recognises the inherent value of the “outdoors experience” in young peoples’ development. It is, however, a message amongst many about educational priorities and one which is currently backed by a very wide range of resourcing responses – from those local authorities that provide a lot to those who currently have no provision or have even recently allowed it to lapse.

Conclusions

- 6.11 For the first time we now have a fairly comprehensive map of what local authority outdoor education provision looks like. We have some understanding of what makes it tick and some insights into the fears, expectations and opportunities that exist in relation to its future. There are gaps in knowledge. We do not know much about the demand side, nor about the alternatives that exist or could be developed to provide pupils with an outdoor experience. We do not know what incentives for schools need to be in place to encourage use or how to counteract the currently perceived disincentives. We do have a baseline for provision and a sector that is enthusiastic to engage schools but is there a debate or a willingness to explore the sector further?

Appendix I: First Version of Authority Topic Guide

Topic Guide 1a: Local Authority Telephone Survey

Section A: Local Authority Level Information

1. Local Authority (LA)			
2. Name of respondent			
3. Are you the nominated Outdoor Education/LOtC Adviser for your LA?	Yes	No	
<i>a. If NO, what is the respondent's role or designation?</i>			
<i>b. If NO, name and contact details (if known) of Outdoor Education/LOtC Adviser (if there is one)</i>			
4. Are there any other people in your LA with key responsibilities for outdoor education/LOtC?	Yes	No	
<i>c. If YES, please specify what their roles are?</i>			
5. Does your LA run or have any responsibility for outdoor education centres?	Yes	No	
<i>d. If YES, how many?</i>			
6. If NO to Q 5, did there use to be any provision for schools in your LA?			
<i>e. If YES, in which year did this provision finish?</i>			
<i>f. How do schools in your LA now access outdoor education provision</i>			
7. Please could provide (if known) the name and contact details with the Finance Manager in your Local Authority responsible for Outdoor Education/LOtC funding			

Section B: Management and Finance and Finance of Centres

This section needs to be completed for each Local Authority Centre

1. Name of Centre				
2. Location of Centre – please provide grid reference if known or postcode				
3. Do you share this centre with another LA?		Yes	No	
a. If YES, which LA (s)?				
b. If YES, is there is a lead LA?		Yes	No	
c. If YES to b, which one?				
4. Is this a day centre or residential? (day/residential/both)				
d. If RESIDENTIAL or BOTH, how many beds does the centre have?				
5. Number of staff employed by the centre?		FT:	PT:	
6. What roles do they have?		Manager Instructor Administration Maintenance, housekeeping, catering		
8. Please can you indicate the Centre's annual running costs.				
7. Can you indicate approximately how much funding the LA has provided to the centre over the past three years		2006/2007	2005/2006	2004/2005
8. Over the next five to ten years is the level of LA funding likely to:	Increase	Stay the Same	Decrease	Don't Know
9. Over the next 5 – 10 years are capital funding needs for routine maintenance likely to:				

Increase		
Stay the same		
Decrease		
Don't know		
10. Is there likely to be any upgrading of facilities?		
11. Is there likely to be any conversion to sustainable running (e.g. alternative fuel sources; water saving; insulation)		
12. Are schools from your LA charged for using this centre?	Yes	No
a. <i>If YES does the LA provide any subsidies for these schools for pupil participation? E.g.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children eligible for Free School Meals?</i> • <i>Children with statements of educational needs?</i> • <i>Other groups of children?</i> 		
13. If this Centre is run by more than one LA are there similar arrangements for the other LA schools	Yes	No
a. <i>If YES, does your LA provide any subsidy to these other LA's and schools?</i>	Yes	No
14. Do schools from other LA's or Independent schools use this Centre?	Yes	No
1. <i>If YES does the LA provide any subsidies for these schools for pupil participation?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children eligible for free school meals?</i> • <i>Children with statements of educational needs?</i> • <i>Other groups of children?</i> 		
15. Approximately what proportion of the running costs of the Centre comes from charging schools for its use?		

Section C: Centre Use

This section needs to be completed for each Local Authority Centre

1. How many schools have used this Centre in the last year? (and where known)			
<i>Primary</i>			
<i>Secondary</i>			
<i>FE and Adult Education</i>			
<i>Special Schools</i>			
<i>Other</i>			
2. In the past 2- 3 years has this significantly INCREASED, significantly DECREASED or roughly STAYED THE SAME?			
<i>Primary</i>			
<i>Secondary</i>			
<i>FE and Adult Education</i>			
<i>Special Schools</i>			
<i>Other</i>			
3. Please can you provide the number of users from each group listed below that have visited the centre in the past three years			
	2006/2007	2005/2006	2004/2005
<i>KS1</i>			
<i>KS2</i>			
<i>KS3</i>			
<i>KS4</i>			
<i>A/AS Level</i>			
<i>NVQ</i>			
<i>ACL</i>			
<i>SEN</i>			
<i>NEETS</i>			
<i>Adults with Learning Difficulties</i>			
<i>Other (Please State)</i>			

Section D: Centre Activities

This section needs to be completed for each local authority centre

1. What kind of activities does the Centre provide?					
a. <i>Adventurous activities</i>				Yes	No
b. <i>Field Studies</i>				Yes	No
c. <i>Farm and countryside education</i>				Yes	No
d. <i>Studies of the built environment or heritage</i>				Yes	No
e. <i>Other (please specify)</i>					
2. For which Early Years Foundation Stage and/or Curriculum Subjects is the Centre a major provider?					
<i>Please ask interviewee to volunteer this information without prompting</i>					
Early Years Foundation Stage					
a. <i>Personal, Social and Emotional Development</i>				Yes	No
b. <i>Communication, Language and Literacy</i>				Yes	No
c. <i>Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy</i>				Yes	No
d. <i>Knowledge and Understanding of the World</i>				Yes	No
e. <i>Physical Development</i>				Yes	No
f. <i>Creative Development.</i>				Yes	No
National Curriculum					
a. <i>Geography</i>	Yes	No	b. <i>English</i>	Yes	No
c. <i>Environmental Science</i>	Yes	No	d. <i>Maths</i>	Yes	No
e. <i>PE</i>	Yes	No	f. <i>Science</i>	Yes	No
g. <i>History</i>	Yes	No	h. <i>ICT</i>	Yes	No
i. <i>RE</i>	Yes	No	j. <i>D&T</i>	Yes	No
k. <i>Music</i>	Yes	No	l. <i>Languages</i>	Yes	No
m. <i>Art</i>	Yes	No	n. <i>Environmental Education</i>	Yes	No
o. <i>Citizenship</i>	Yes	No	p. <i>PSHE</i>	Yes	No
3. Does the Centre's activities help develop any non curricular skills?					
<i>Please ask interviewee to volunteer this information without prompting</i>					
Personal Development	Yes			No	
Leadership	Yes			No	
Communications	Yes			No	
Teamwork	Yes			No	

Appendix II: Final Local Authority Topic Guide

Topic Guide 1b: Local Authority Telephone Survey

Interviewer Briefing

CRG have been appointed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families to undertake an Assessment of Capacity and Viability of Local Authority Outdoor Education Centres. The Manifesto for Learning Outside the Classroom was launched in 2006 and underlines a commitment for all young people to have the opportunity to learn or development themselves outside the classroom – outdoor education centres play an important part in meeting this commitment. Recently a number of local authorities have announced their decision to close their outdoor centres or introduce self financing. Furthermore many schools have reported difficulties in paying higher centre fees. This project consists of: a mapping exercise of local authority provision in centres, their capacity and viability via telephone interviews with all 150 local authorities in England together with desk research; case studies will be conducted with 6 centres and will include interviews with centre staff and visiting schools where possible. The findings from this project will inform the development of options for maintaining and developing this key out of classroom learning provision.

Interviewer Instructions

Please complete all of the questionnaire with the LA advisor. Please ask them for contact details for centre managers. We will follow up a selection of these with more detailed questions at a later date.

<i>Date and Time</i>	
<i>Interviewer</i>	
<i>Interviewee</i>	
<i>Tel Number</i>	

8. Local authority (LA)			
9. Name of respondent			
10. Are you the nominated Outdoor Education/LOtC Adviser for your LA?	Yes	No	
<i>g. If NO, what is the respondent's role or designation?</i>			
<i>h. If NO, name and contact details (if known) of Outdoor Education/LOtC Adviser (if there is one)</i>			
11. Are there any other people in your LA with key responsibilities for outdoor education/LOtC?	Yes	No	
<i>i. If YES, please specify what their roles are?</i>			
12. Does your LA run or have any responsibility for outdoor education centres?	Yes	No	
<i>a. If YES, how many? (Please identify by name)</i>			
	Name	Postcode (Location if not available)	Website (if available)
Centre 1			
Centre 2			
Centre 3			
Centre 4			
Centre 5			
<i>b. Please can you give a brief overview of the future of these centres (i.e. secure or vulnerable)</i>			
13. If NO to Q 5, did there use to be any provision for your LA's schools?			
<i>a. If YES, in which year did this provision finish?</i>			
<i>b. How do schools in your LA now access outdoor education provision</i>			

c. Does the LA provide any subsidies/ funding for school accessing provision elsewhere

14. Can you indicate approximately how much funding the LA provides to its centres in financial year 2007/2008 and whether this has INCREASED, STAYED THE SAME OR DECREASED over previous years:

	2007/2008 Funding	Increase	Stay the Same	Decrease	Don't Know
Centre 1					
Centre 2					
Centre 3					
Centre 4					
Centre 5					

a. Please can you briefly describe any reasons for these changes

15. Over the next five to ten years is the level of LA funding likely to:

	Increase	Stay the Same	Decrease	Don't Know
Centre 1				
Centre 2				
Centre 3				
Centre 4				
Centre 5				

b. Please can you briefly describe any reasons for these changes

16. Are these centres Residential/ Day or Both. If residential roughly how many beds do they have?:

	Residential	Beds	Day	Both
Centre 1				
Centre 2				
Centre 3				
Centre 4				
Centre 5				

17. Roughly how many part time and full time staff do these centres have

	Total Staff	Full Time	Part Time
<i>Centre 1</i>			
<i>Centre 2</i>			
<i>Centre 3</i>			
<i>Centre 4</i>			
<i>Centre 5</i>			

18. Do they employ seasonal staff? Roughly how many and when?

19. What user groups do the centres cater for?

	Primary	Secondary	FE/ Youth and Adult Education	Special Schools	Other (e.g. corporate events, private groups)
<i>Centre 1</i>					
<i>Centre 2</i>					
<i>Centre 3</i>					
<i>Centre 4</i>					
<i>Centre 5</i>					

20. Are schools from your LA subsidised for using the centre?

	Yes please note arrangements	No	Other arrangements
<i>Centre 1</i>			
<i>Centre 2</i>			
<i>Centre 3</i>			
<i>Centre 4</i>			
<i>Centre 5</i>			

21. What activities do the centres deliver?

	Adventurous	Field Studies	Farm and countryside education	Studies of the built environment or heritage	Curriculum	Personal development	Other (please specify)
<i>Centre 1</i>							
<i>Centre 2</i>							
<i>Centre 3</i>							
<i>Centre 4</i>							
<i>Centre 5</i>							

22. We would like to talk to a small number of centre managers to gather some more in depth information on the centres. Please could you provide contact details:

	Centre Manager Name	Tel	E Mail
Centre 1			
Centre 2			
Centre 3			
Centre 4			
Centre 5			

23. Do you have a website for your outdoor education department?

Appendix III: Centre Manager Topic Guide

Topic Guide 2: Local Authority Outdoor Education Centre

Interviewer Briefing

CRG have been appointed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families to undertake an Assessment of Capacity and Viability of Local Authority Outdoor Education Centres. The Manifesto for Learning Outside the Classroom was launched in 2006 and underlines a commitment for all young people to have the opportunity to learn or develop themselves outside the classroom – outdoor education centres play an important part in meeting this commitment. Recently a number of local authorities have announced their decision to close their outdoor centres or introduce self financing. Furthermore many schools have reported difficulties in paying higher centre fees.

This project consists of:

- a mapping exercise of local authority provision in centres, their capacity and viability via telephone interviews with all 150 local authorities in England, together with desk research;
- a sample survey with 50 centres focusing on maintenance requirements
- case studies will be conducted with 6 centres and will include interviews with centre staff and visiting schools where possible. The findings from this project will inform the development of options for maintaining and developing this key out of classroom learning provision.

Interviewer Instructions

Please complete all of the questionnaire with the Centre Manager.

<i>Date and Time</i>	
<i>Interviewer</i>	
<i>Local Authority</i>	
<i>Outdoor Education Centre</i>	
<i>Interviewee</i>	
<i>Tel Number</i>	

Section A: Income and Outgoings

1. How much funding do you receive from your Local Authority

2. In the past 5 years has this:

Increased	
Stayed the same	
Decreased	
Don't know	

Please give reasons for answer

3. How has this impacted the Centre?

e.g increase/ decrease in activities provided; staff employed; upgrading, maintenance etc

4. Over the next 5 years do you expect funding to:

Increase	
Stay the same	
Decrease	
Don't know	

Please give reasons for answer

5. How do you think this will impact the centre?

e.g increase/ decrease in activities provided; staff employed; upgrading, maintenance etc

6. Does your centre receive funding from other sources?

- a. Who
- b. How much
- c. Has this INCREASED, DECREASED or STAYED THE SAME in recent years
- d. Do you expect this to INCREASE, DECREASE or STAY THE SAME in future years

7. Do you plan to obtain funding from other sources?

- a. *Who*
- b. *Why*
- c. *How much*

8. What are the centre's current annual running costs

9. In the past 5 years has this:

Increased	
Stayed the same	
Decreased	
Don't know	

Please give reasons for answer

10. Over the next 5 years do you expect running costs to:		
Increase		
Stay the same		
Decrease		
Don't know		
Please give reasons for answer		
11. Are schools and/ or users from the Local Authority charged for using the centre?	Yes	No
12. Are there any subsidies in place? <i>Please give details</i>		
13. Do other Local Authorities use the centre?	Yes	No
14. Are there any subsidies in place? <i>Please give details</i>		
15. Approximately what proportion of the running costs of the Centre comes from charging schools for its use?		
16. Are there any other major sources of income for the Centre? (Please describe)		

Section B: Maintenance and Upgrading

17. In the next 5 years are capital funding needs for routine maintenance likely to:

Increase	
Stay the same	
Decrease	
Don't know	

Please give reasons for answer

18. If a residential centre - are there any plans to increase capacity?

- a. *When*
- b. *Why*
- c. *By how much*

19. Are there any other plans to upgrade the centre over the next 5 years (e.g. increase bathrooms, improve kitchen, improve equipment etc)

- a. *What*
- b. *When*
- c. *Why*

Note to interviewer: please investigate in brief whether there are any upgrades that the centre would like to do but can't. We are trying to find out what help the centre attract new users, improve their viability etc

20. Is there likely to be any conversion to sustainable running (e.g. alternative fuel sources; water saving; insulation)

Section C: Employee Numbers and Structures

21. How many full time and part time staff do you employ and roughly what are their positions:

	Full Time	Part Time
Management		
Teaching		
Instructors		
Administration		
Maintenance, housekeeping, catering		

22. Does the centre employ any sessional or seasonal staff?

- a. How many
- b. When

23. Has there been any significant change in staffing numbers or structures over the past 5 years/ are any changes planned?

- a. What
- b. Why
- c. When

Section D: Users and Activities

24. Can you roughly indicate your main user groups?

Primary	
Secondary	
Further Education	
Youth	
Adult	
Special Schools	
Other e.g. Corporate	

25. Have there been any significant changes in user type over the past 5 years/ are there any planned changes?

- a. What
- b. Why
- c. When

26. What activities does the centre provide:

Adventure	
Curriculum	
Field	
Personal and team development	
Built environment and heritage	
Farm and Countryside	
Other	

27. Have there been any significant changes in activities delivered over the past 5 years/ are there any planned changes?

- a. *What*
- b. *Why*
- c. *When*

28. Have there been any policy trends (locally/nationally that have impacted on the centre's activities and operations?

29. Broadly speaking what do you think the future for education outside the classroom will look like?

Appendix IV: Additional Local Authority Outdoor Provision Figures

Figure I: Centres Shared Between Local Authorities

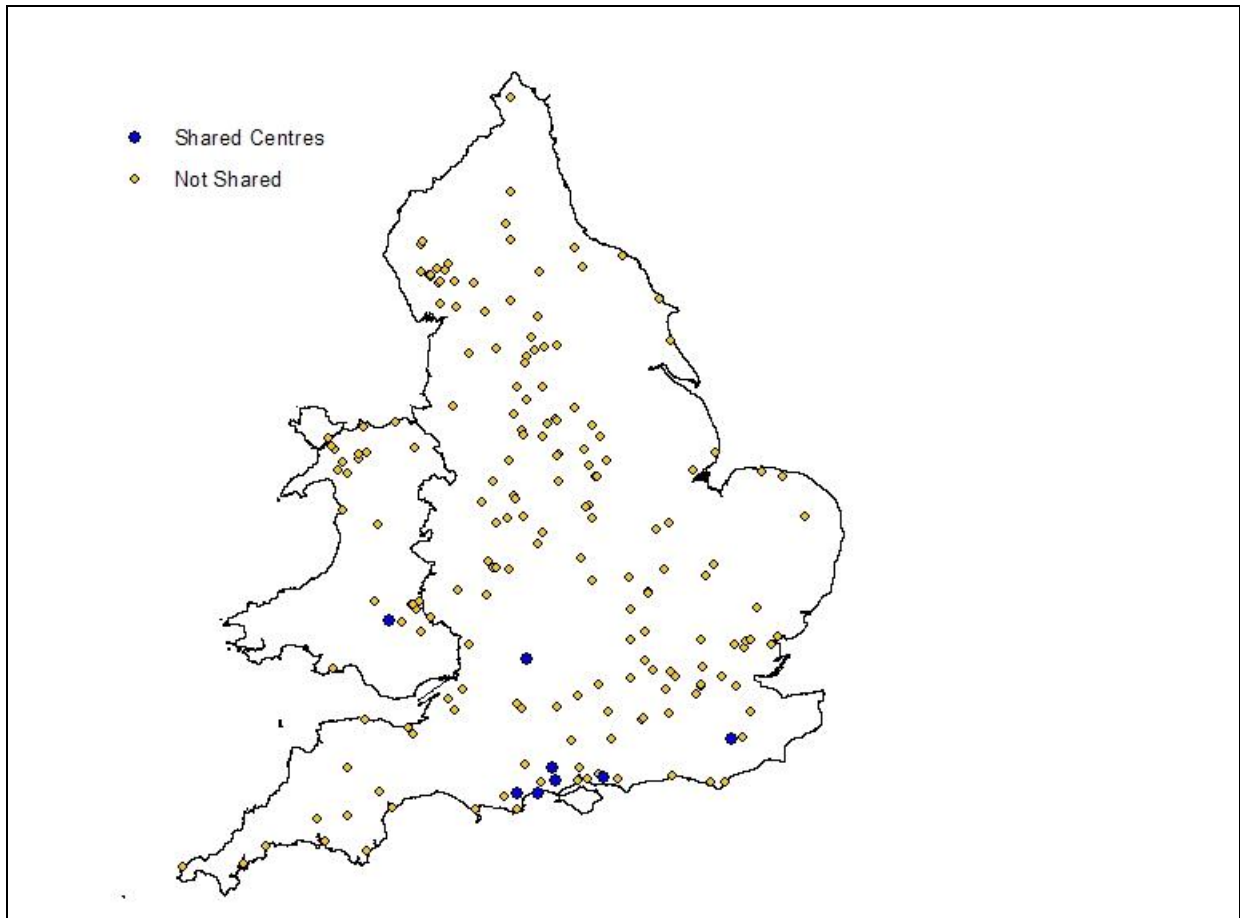


Figure II: Number of Residential Beds by Centre

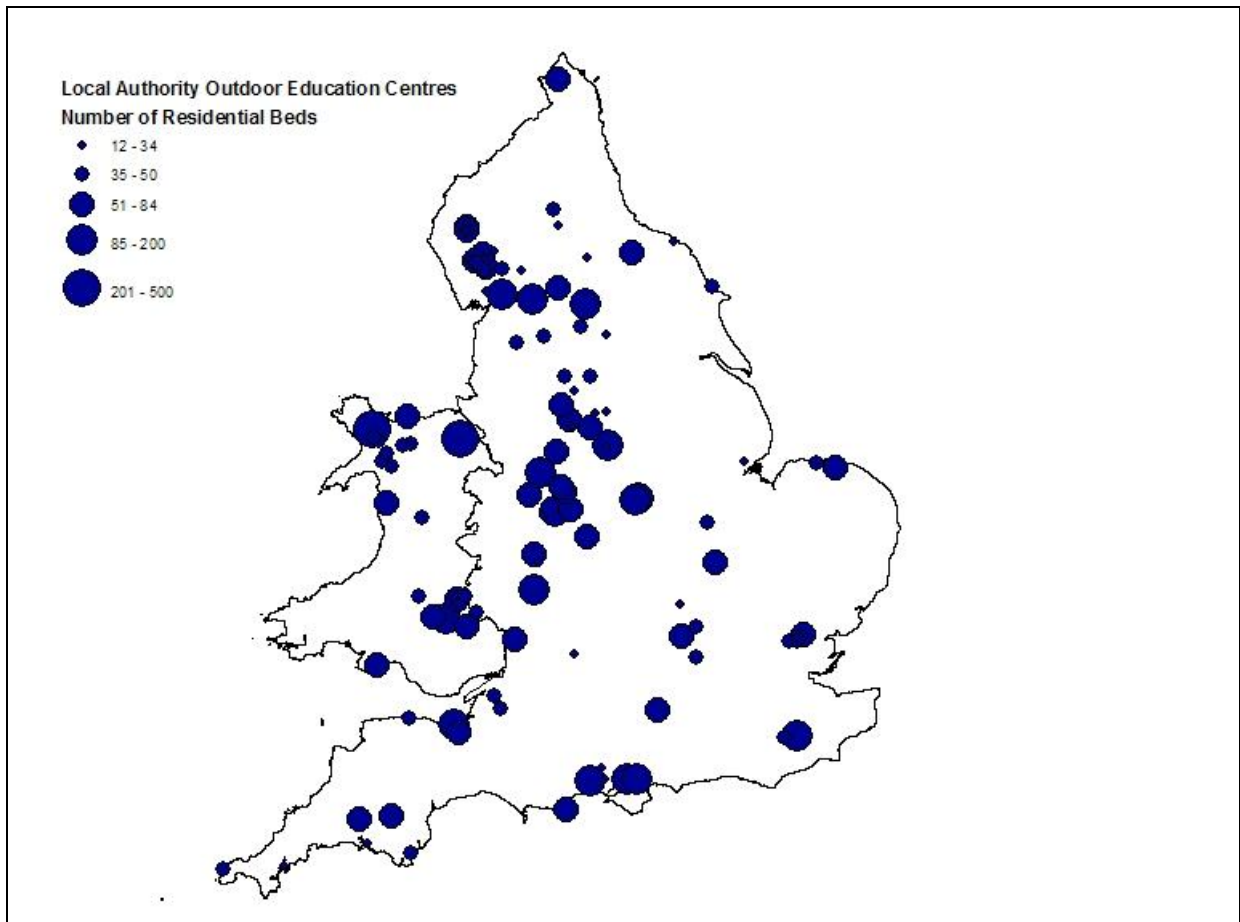


Figure III: Local Authority Funds, by Centre

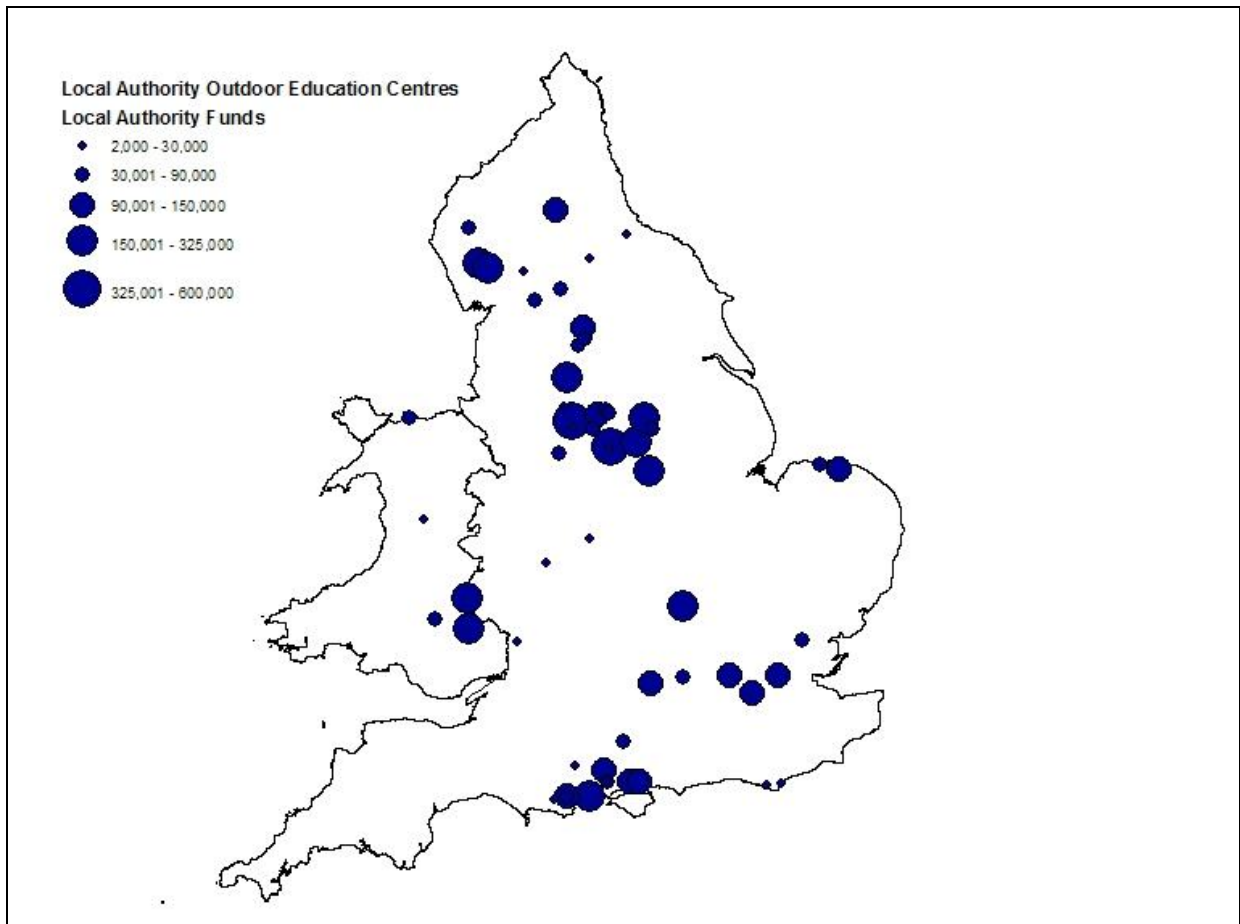


Figure IV: Number of Full Time Staff by Centre

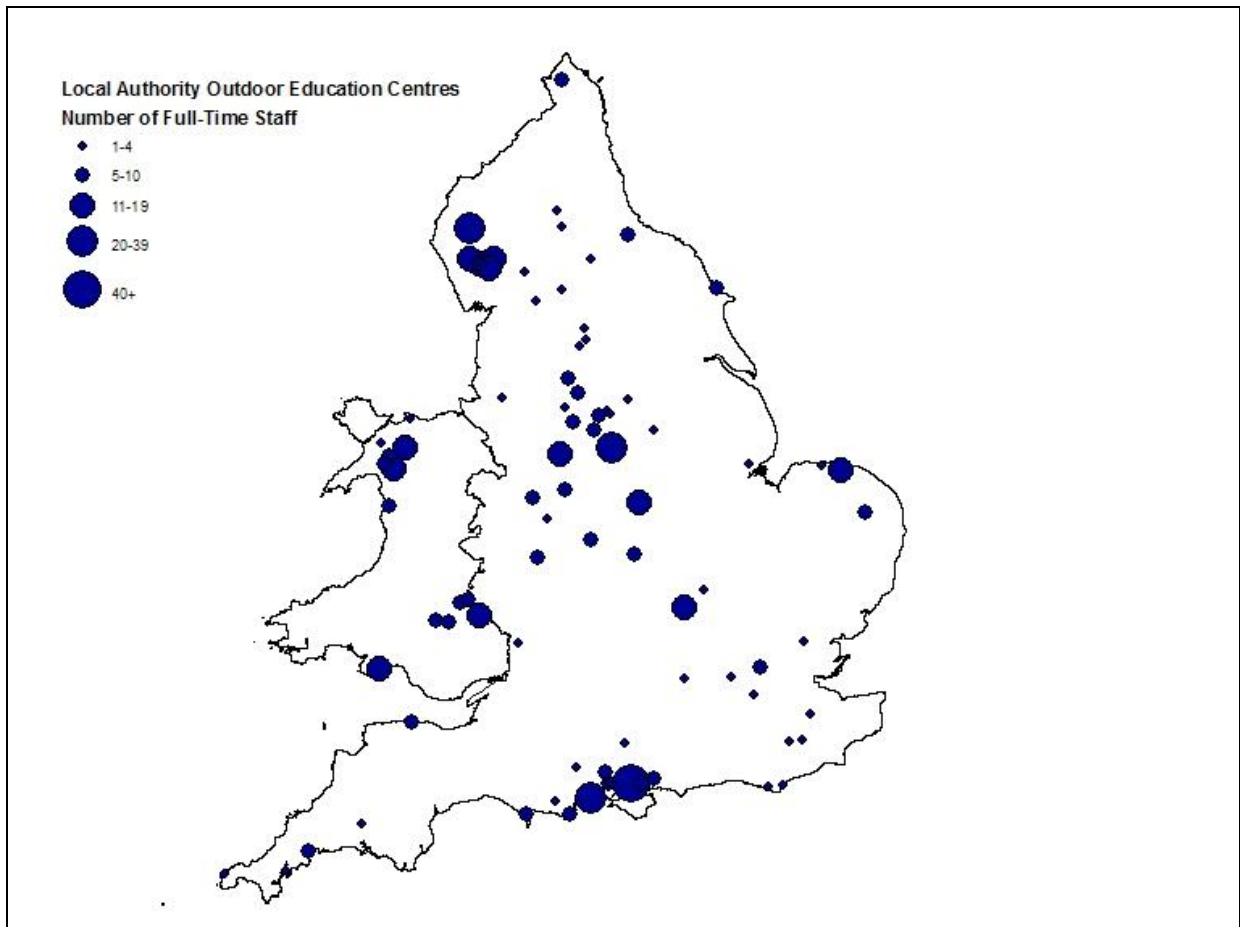


Figure V: Centres within National Park Boundaries

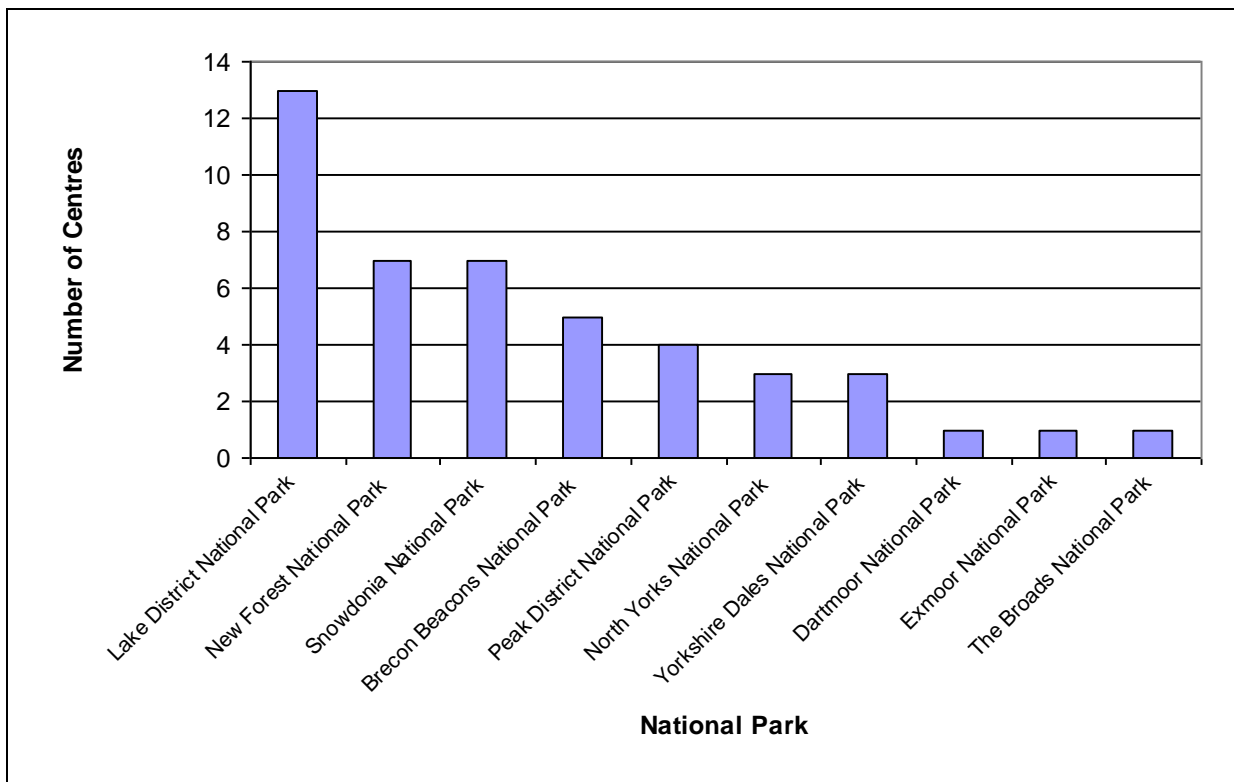


Figure VI: Density of Centres

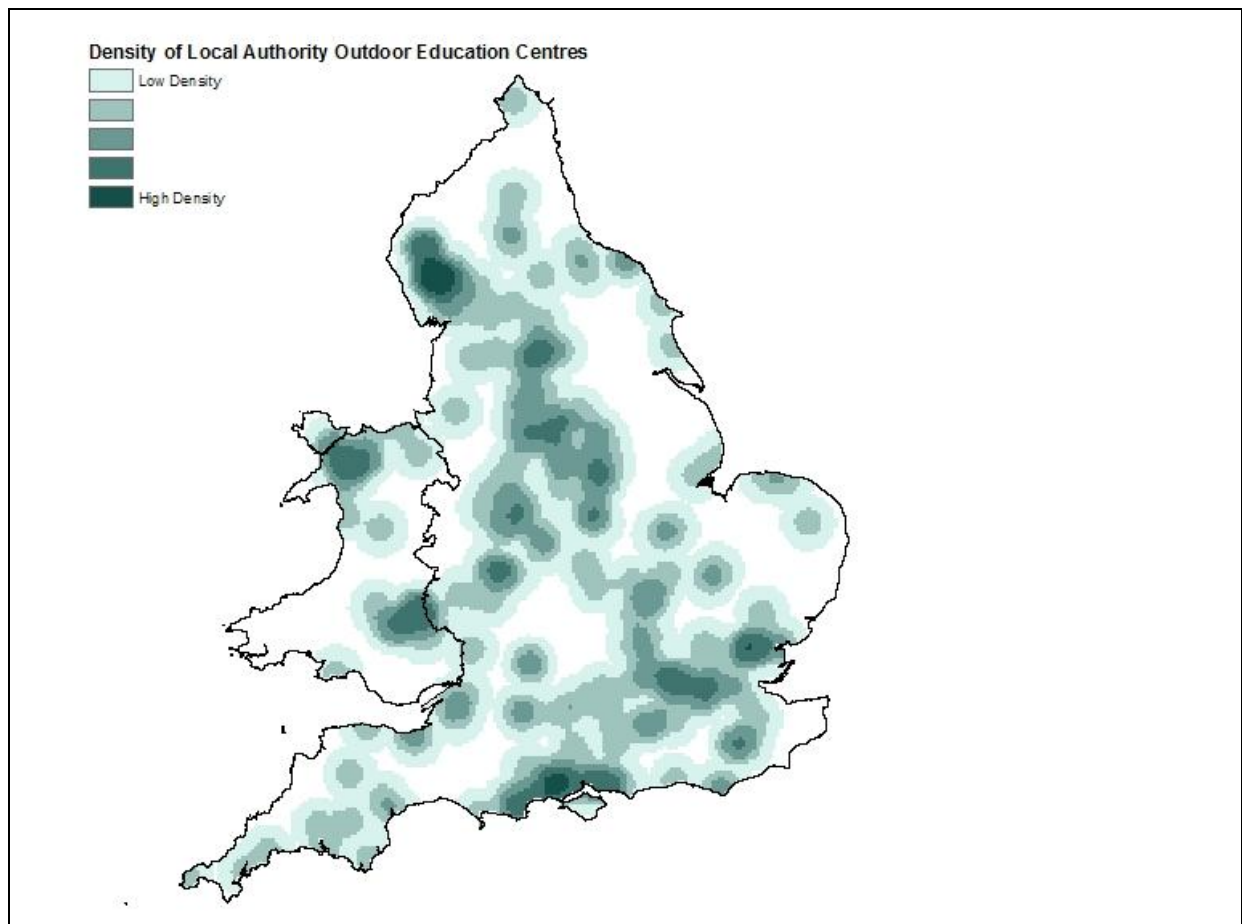


Figure VII: Centres Located Inside or Outside their Local authority

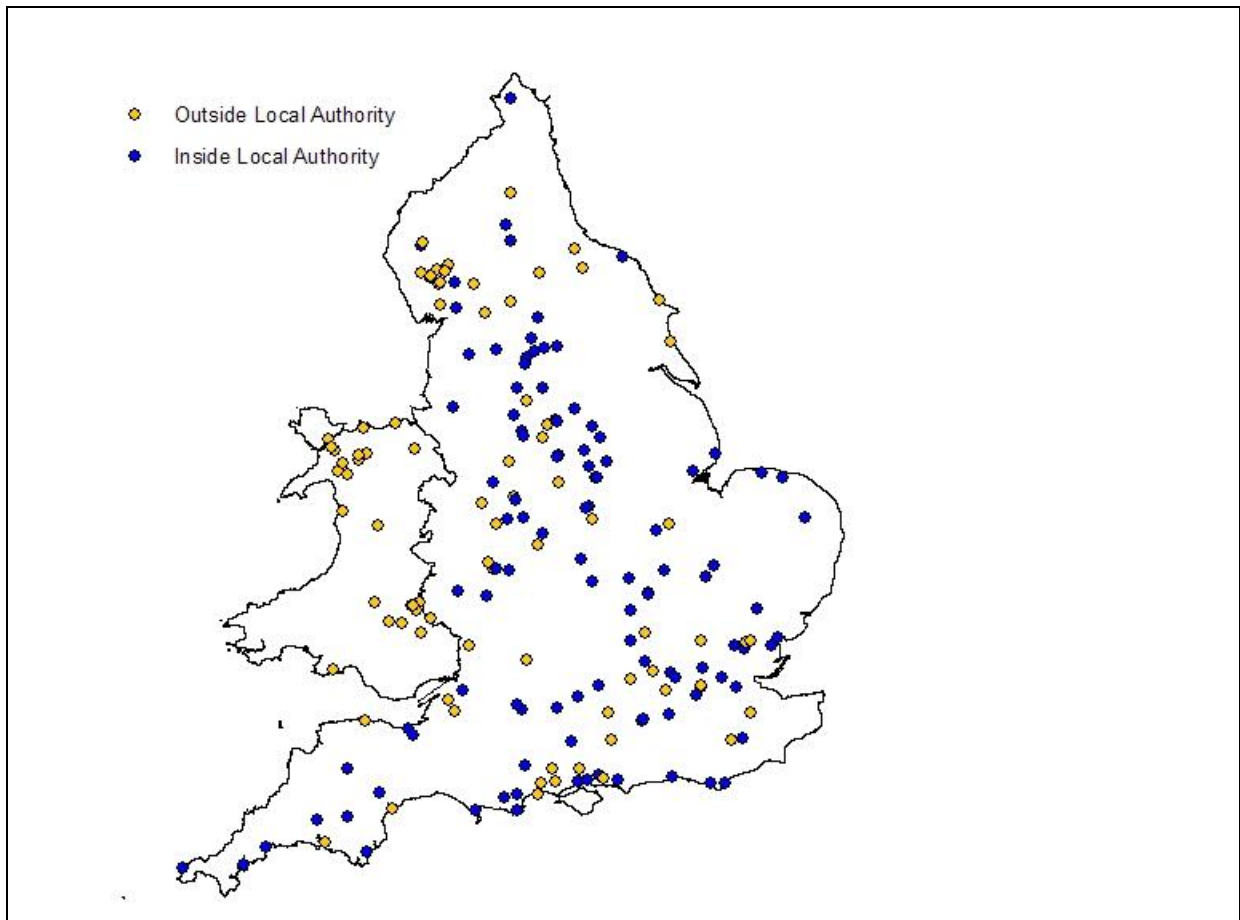
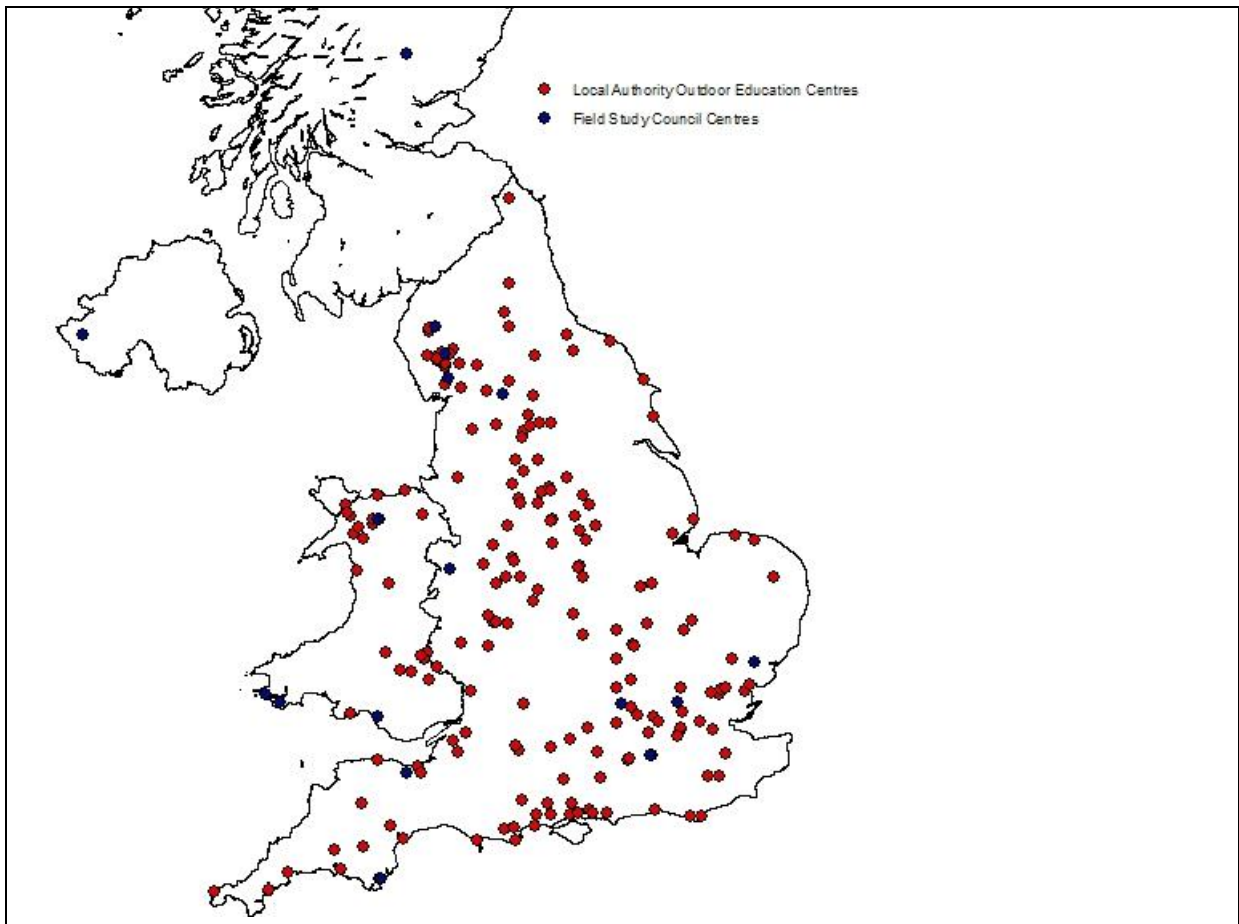


Figure VIII: Field Study Council Centres



Appendix V: Case Study Topic Guide

OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTRES

Case Study Profile

Introduction

CRG Research Ltd and Cardiff University have been appointed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families to undertake an Assessment of Capacity and Viability of Local Authority Outdoor Education Centres. The Manifesto for Learning Outside the Classroom was launched in 2006 and underlines a commitment for all young people to have the opportunity to learn or develop themselves outside the classroom – outdoor education centres play an important part in meeting this commitment. Recently a number of local authorities have announced their decision to close their outdoor centres or introduce self financing. Furthermore many schools have reported difficulties in paying higher centre fees.

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- case studies will be conducted with 6 centres and will include interviews with centre staff and visiting schools where possible. The findings from this project will inform the development of options for maintaining and developing this key out of classroom learning provision.

Centre Background

- When the centre started
- How it has developed

Facilities

- Capacity (*has this increased/ are there plans to increase*)
- Special features

Management

- Management arrangements (*investigate the extent of LA input etc*)
- Internally

Financial

- Contribution from authority (*any pros and cons to being subsidised/self-funded?*)
- Other income
- Charging arrangements
- Solvency/sustainability
- Financial history – better/worse
- Competition

Staffing

- Numbers and types of staff (*do they fulfil specific roles; have numbers changed/ likely to change and why*)
- Skill sets (*have these changed significantly and why; are they likely to change and why*)
- Employment arrangements (*contracts/ full time/ part time/ fixed term etc*)
- Salary scales (*are they same as LA pay scales; have costs increased and why*)
- Recruitment issues (*where do they recruit from; are there problems recruiting the 'right' staff and why*)
- Seasonal/ sessional staff (*investigate use of these*)

Utilisation

- Types of users (*have these changed/ likely to change and why*)
- *If moving to self-financing, will this impact on the focus of user groups targeted?*
- Access – limited or open?
- Occupancy rates (*investigate break even targets*)

Activities/ Educational Programmes

- Types of activities/ educational programmes offered (*have these changed/ likely to change and why*)
- Any activities/ programmes they would like to introduce but can't fund?

Policy Issues

- Support from authority
- School curriculum issues
- Access
- Licensing impacts (*consider in relation to costs and funding arrangements*)

Maintenance

- Arrangements (*how pays for/ contracts for the work*)
- Backlog (*does this impact on their ability to offer any services, attract user groups, etc? Will it have an impact in future?*)
- Any conversion to sustainable fuel sources/ installation of energy saving measures.

Future Plans

- Threats (*what can/is being done to address these?*)
- Opportunities (*does anything hinder their ability to capitalise on these opportunities? If so, what?*)
- Any activities/ maintenance/ capital projects they would like to undertake to attract new users/ retain existing user but cannot currently fund?

Issues to Investigate with Visiting Groups

- Why did they come to this centre
- What did they expect to get out of the visit? Has it met these expectations?
- How important do they feel it is that children have access to these facilities?
- Funding/ subsidies etc
- Are there any activities/ educational programmes they would like to see provided